

Don't Fight For Your Right // 1 Corinthians 9:1-23

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[0:00] The following message was given by Walt Alexander, pastor at Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! 1 Corinthians 9, verse 1. Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen the Lord? Are you not 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. And this is my defense to those who would examine me. Do we not have the right to eat and drink? Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of our Lord and Cephas?

Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense?

[1:07] Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? 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 speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake because the plowman should plow in hope, and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop.

If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much to reap material things from you? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?

Nevertheless, we have made no use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. 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?

[2:20] In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. 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 of boasting. For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting.

For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel. 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 a 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.

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant of all, that I may win more of them. To the Jews I became a Jew in order to win Jews.

[3:29] To those under the law I became as one under the law, though not myself being under the law, that I might win those under the law. 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. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak.

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.

This is the word of the Lord. Praise the Lord. May God bless the hearing and the preaching and the obeying of his word. Well, in 1986, the Beastie Boys gave every 80s teen an anthem, you have a right, you got to fight for your right to party.

It's not my fault. But our understanding of rights in this country didn't go wrong with the Beastie Boys. The Declaration of Independence says, we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men

have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

[4:54] But the first draft of the Declaration of Independence said, we hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable. And yet those words were struck out.

The first draft was making clear that certain rights are moral and based on the teaching of Scripture, that all men are created by God, equal before God, and deserving of certain basic human rights. So our trouble with rights stumbled right from the beginning when we severed our rights from our Creator. As our nation continued to grow up, it became clear that there were other rights not included.

So we had the Bill of Rights. We added other rights to them. African Americans had no rights. Women had no right to vote. All of us needed the right to remain silent and to due process. These rights were secured by law, and they were important, but the discussion of rights has exploded over the past several decades, revealing our culture's obsession with individuality and freedom.

[6:05] Everyone, it seems, is fighting for their right. I have a right to health care. I have a right to a certain degree of wealth.

I have a right to be treated as I want. I have a right to behave as I want. In recent years, one man brought a lawsuit against McDonald's because he did not fit just right into one of the booths.

He had a right to sit down. He argued that since 20% of Americans are obese, 20% of the tables should be big enough to accommodate obese people in McDonald's.

It seems a bit absurd, but it's going on all over the place. It seems that the same story about rights was taking place in Corinth.

Now, if you remember back in June, six weeks ago, something like that, we studied a passage. The church had written to Paul. He's responding to a letter.

[7:07] We've seen that as he goes to this letter. He's answering some of their questions, but they had written to him to talk about food offered to idols. Now, Paul begins to answer that question in chapter 8, verse 1, and continues all the way to chapter 11, verse 1.

Now, because there's no temples to Athena or Artemis downtown, there's no need for us to discuss food sacrificed to idols, but it was a very important issue for them and a very important question for them.

The church in Corinth had suddenly been converted, and so in the midst of a city filled with pagan temples, they were beginning to live for God.

Sacrifices were repeatedly offered in pagan temples throughout Corinth, and the leftovers were served up in the temples, kind of like restaurants, or sold in the marketplace.

It seems that if you wanted to eat meat in Corinth, it was almost avoidable that you would be eating meat sacrificed to idols.

[8:10] Now, many of the church in the church were the strong people in the church, and they were saying, idols aren't real. They don't matter. We have the right to eat what we want, but some were not so strong, as we saw that in chapter 8.

Some, because of their association with idolatry before, because they used to go to that temple, they couldn't eat that meat knowing it was associated with that temple without sinning against God, and after all, the Bible says, to go against your conscience, even if it's not aligned correctly with Scripture, is sin.

And so the strong and influential wrote Paul and said, why can't we eat meat sacrificed to idols? I know that question seems so remote for us, and yet, why can't we eat meat sacrificed to idols is the context here.

And Paul begins answering their question. If you look there in chapter 8, at the end of chapter 8, after making his first point, he said, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

So unlike the strong who are saying, we have a right to eat whatever we want, Paul says, the believer should almost never fight for their right.

[9:25] The believer should consider, rather than that, should consider every decision, every choice, every commitment, in light of allegiance to Christ, and the advance of the gospel. The believer should be willing to lay down almost every right for the cause of Christ.

So where we're going is fight for your right to lay down anything and everything for the sake of the gospel. Fight for your right to lay down anything and everything for the sake of the gospel. Now,

what are your rights?

Since the first question, the apostle Paul answers, and we're going to reflect on, the strong have been fighting for their rights. Idols aren't real. There's only one God. We have the right to eat whatever we want.

So Paul defends his right to receive support as an apostle, as a gospel minister. Now, these are loaded verses. My wife read them this morning.

She's like, what in the world is going on there? And they are loaded verses. So hopefully I'm going to be able to take them apart for a little bit of us, but for a little bit this morning. But in verses 1 to 14, like a master order, Paul asks 17 rhetorical questions to underline his unquestioned right to receive support as a gospel minister.

[10:37] He appeals first to his apostleship. Look down there in verse 1. Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? He's not telling them something they don't know, but reminding them of the implications of what they do know about him.

They know he's an apostle because he's seen the Lord. That's what he says. Have I not seen the Lord? He says, Are you not my workmanship in the Lord?

Goes on to say that you have the seal of my apostleship. Now, we still seal documents and notarize them and sign them in America for weddings, certificates, and things like that.

And Paul is saying, I didn't seal my apostleship on a piece of paper. I wrote it on your heart. You know how I was among you. He's reminding them of his first days in Corinth, how they were transformed by the gospel.

He continues and says, If I am an apostle, then I deserve the same rights as the other apostles.

That's what he says in verse 4. Do we not have the right to eat and drink?

[11:39] You know, he's just saying material support in that way. Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife? Now, contrary to some opinion, it appears, based on this verse, that the early apostles were not celibate and unmarried, but rather took on a wife.

He says, The other apostles had a wife. The brothers of our Lord had a wife. And Cephas, that is, Peter, had a wife. And so he's saying, We have the right to that as well.

But then he continues and gets to his point. Or is it only Barnabas and I have no right to refrain from working for a living? So he's appealing to his apostleship as a defense for support for gospel ministry.

He continues next in verse 7. To common wisdom. Who serves as a soldier at his own expense?

The rhetorical answer is no one. Who plants a vineyard without eating any of the fruit?

The farmer eats some of his fruit, as you guys, some of you are doing this summer. Who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? This idea is common wisdom that you would benefit in that way.

[12:50] And so too with gospel ministry. Verses 8 to 11, he appeals next to scripture. He says, Do I say these things on my own authority? Does not the law say the same?

Verse written in the law of Moses, You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain. That's a reference to Deuteronomy 25:4. But he says, Is it for oxen that God is concerned?

After all, Martin Luther said, Oxen can't read. So it wasn't placed that no oxen takes up

Deuteronomy and says, Give me some of the slop. I'm entitled to it. No, no, no.

It's written for us. It's a biblical principle. It's an argument from the lesser to the greater. God cares about all creatures great and small. But if God cares for all creatures great and small, how much more does he care for those creatures created in his image?

To those ministers of his gospel. The lesser to the greater argument continues.

[13:54] In verse 11, when he says, If we've sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? The idea is we've sown spiritual things which have greater value because they do not pass away.

Is it too much if we reap material things from you? We've sown with our prayers and preaching. Is it too much to share in the harvest? As if the argument wasn't tight enough, he continues and references the Levites in the temple.

After all, we know the Levites. Do you not know? The Levites did not get a share of the inheritance. Their inheritance was serving the Lord. They ate of the sacrifices in the temple. So he's saying the same thing is true of gospel ministers in the gospel age that's going on right now.

And finally, he appealed to the command of none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. Look in verse 14. In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living from it.

It's a command. It's a reference to Luke 10, 7. And we know that's true because Paul references both of these verses, Deuteronomy 25, 4 and Luke 10, 7 in 1 Timothy 5.

[15:06] It's when Jesus sent out the 12 and the 70. And he said, don't carry a money bag or a knapsack or sandals. Go to the house where you're welcome, for the laborer deserves some of the wages.

Now, that's quite a defense, right? It's kind of startling to read. The strong have been, I think the idea is, Paul's trying to overwhelm them.

The strong have been defending their rights. We are strong. You know, we get the right to eat what we want. You know, sometimes that's the way it is in the church. I got the right to do whatever I want, right? I got freedom.

And yet, Paul said, my defense is better. Whatever you think you have the right for, my defense is better.

It's unquestioned. As a gospel worker, he deserves financial and material support for his labors, and the same is true with other gospel workers. Now, what should we say about this?

[16:07] First, we must notice that rights are different than entitlement. Paul's defense of rights is based on wisdom and scripture. The vast majority of the rights we fight about are really things we think we're entitled to.

Last month, we went through the screw-tape letters. I went through all my notes in it yesterday afternoon, but we read the screw-tape letters, so it's kind of a weird book to read because everything's inverted.

It's about kind of a prince demon writing to a worker demon. so to speak, Wormwood, and telling him how to tempt the Christian.

He said this, to tempt the Christian in the following way. The great thing is to bring him into the state in which the denial of any one indulgence, it matters not which, champagne or tea, sol cobert, which I googled to find out was French food or something, or French way of cooking, kind of like sous vide, which is another Latin word or something, so that didn't help, or cigarettes.

Hope you don't smoke those, but it matters not which, champagne or tea, sol cobert, or cigarettes, puts him out. And that's the way it happens, right?

[17:29] I deserve my champagne, my tea, I deserve my house, my lawn, get off my lawn, I deserve my time, my vacation, my family, my wife, my peace, my satisfaction, satisfaction, but the truth is, biblically, we deserve nothing.

We're entitled to nothing. We're obviously entitled to the protection of life, but after we sin against God, we're deserving of only eternal damnation.

And so, it's just incredible, but there's also no aspect of our lives, where we think we are entitled more than what we, more to do what we want, than with our money.

It's my money, I earned it. And yet, the Lord says, it's my money, I gave it. Now, as a pastor, I want to talk about finances about as much as I want a hole in my head.

But sometimes, our thinking about pastors and money, which is clearly this subject at hand, we think, Lord, you keep him humble, and we'll keep him poor. And these verses are important for us to consider.

[18:46] Each person who benefits from the ministry to the church should ask, am I heeding these verses? Am I supporting those who minister appropriately? I'm thankful for the material and financial resources this church has given.

This church has been known for his generosity, been very generous since day one, since we launched. And it releases Taylor, Gill, and myself to serve the Lord freely in a full-time capacity. But nevertheless, these are important things for us to consider together. When it comes to giving, I would encourage you with a few principles. Which our financial advisory team would wholeheartedly agree.

One is to begin with the tithe. Giving 10% of your income is not commanded in the New Testament. It is in the Old. But it's hard to imagine we should give less in the New Covenant than they gave in the Old.

We should give more. So the tithe, 10% off the top, should be the floor of giving. Give first to the local church and then to other ministries.

[20:00] I think that's a principle woven in here. These people that sow among you, you give to the local church to provide for the gospel ministers there, but also for the neighbors who are provided for, the needy, and the burdened person closest to you.

It's so easy to write a check to someone far away, and yet someone near God's called you to in a unique way, in a different way. Commit to increasing your giving each year or as income increases. It's such an important principle as you continue to grow in the Lord. Finally, invite real accountability into your finances. Finances tend to be a world that we keep incredibly private, and yet I think that's incredibly unwise.

Invite someone in. Does this still look like somebody who's radically living for Christ? Get some help. So what are your rights? Secondly, when should you forfeit your rights?

When should you forfeit your right? After this airtight defense of his right to receive financial and material support for his labors, we would assume Paul is ready to ask the \$64,000 question, which is, how much can I put you down for?

[21:13] A defense like this reads like a fundraising letter, and that's not what the apostle Paul does here. Paul makes this defense of his right, not to ask for money, but to teach them how to understand their rights.

Again and again, twice in these verses, while he's deserving of their financial and material support, he makes clear he has forfeited it. Look in verse 12. If others share this rightful claim, and you saw the repeated emphasis on right, the rightful claim upon you, do we not even more?

Yet I made no use of this right. Verse 15. But I have made no use of any of these right, nor am I writing to secure any such provision.

Now, why does Paul reject their support? In 2 Corinthians 11, he says, I robbed other churches. Now, that's hyperbole. He's not, you know, Bonnie and Clyde or something like that.

He said, I robbed other churches so that I could preach the gospel to you. That's what he says to Corinth. So, he accepted money. This is not the apostle Paul saying he never accepted money. He did the tent maker by trade, but he accepted money from different churches.

[22:27] But why does he reject it from the Corinthians? The first reason is what is called patronage. Many people have defended this and understanding of what was going on in Corinth, this Roman colony in Greece.

We all know that nothing comes from nothing. After all, the sound of music taught us, and many things come with strings attached, with our mother-in-law taught us that one. And there was a system for these things called patronage in the first century.

If you were an artist and you needed to do your work, you would find a patron. You would find someone to give you a cash advance, so to speak, to work on your work, to paint your beautiful things, to sell them.

But the catch was, you reported to that person. You kind of hung on to them. You needed them. You needed their money to subsist with. You needed the help. You're a philosopher, too.

If you sat in the city gates, so to speak, and pondered the deep, imponderable things of life, you needed someone to support you. Socrates, Aristotle, they needed someone to support them, to think these great thoughts.

[23:35] But the same catch was there. You would be obligated to them. And so in Corinth, very documented, you increased your status by sharing your wealth, so that you had kind of more people hanging on, more followers, more people looking to you, working for you, depending on you, following you.

And we see the same thing in our culture. See it with athletes. You could watch the ESPN documentary, *Broke*. All these athletes, they get their first big contract, and they look in their bank account, all their money's gone, because they pay off all these people, and all these people are looking to them.

They've been following them. They've been waiting for the payday. And so bodyguards, personal trainers, personal chefs, all sorts of people are along for the ride, looking for a handout.

And that's what was going on in Corinth. So the important people had an entourage of people looking to them, leaning on them, reporting them, coming in the morning, asking, what do you need me to do today for you?

And Paul knew if he accepted money in that context, he would overturn the gospel. Honor would not be reserved for those who serve, but for those with wealth.

[24 : 57] Honor would not be reserved for those who are humble, but for those who are successful, or something like that. And so the gospel would be overturned, so to speak.

And so Paul says, we endure anything rather than put an obstacle before the gospel of Christ. Look in verse 12. We endure anything rather than put a gospel in the way of the gospel of Christ. Literally, he said, we endure all things rather than put any one thing in the way of the gospel. And so when Paul arrived in Corinth, he worked late at night, making tents with Aquila and Priscilla. So they could preach the gospel throughout the day. Which should lead us to think very differently about our rights. The second reason Paul denied any support from Corinth is because of his conviction.

He said, I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. The idea is, unlike every other minister, Paul's call to Christ was a call to preach.

[26 : 16] The Lord, if we remember on the Damascus Road, the Lord appeared to him and said, I'm going to show you how much you must suffer for my name. This arrogant, blasphemer, persecutor, the Lord arrested him in his steps, knocked him off his donkey.

He said, I'm going to show you how much you must suffer for my name to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles. And so the apostle Paul said, necessity is laid upon me. You see that, woe to me if I don't preach the gospel.

This idea, my ground for boasting is this idea that all of my life, all of my labors, and all of my preaching is a sacrificial offering to the one who changed my life.

That's what Paul is saying when he says, when he says down there, if I do it of my own will, verse 17, I have a reward. If not of my own will, I'm still entrusted with his stewardship.

This idea that even if he accepted money, he still has to preach the gospel because it's woven into his call to Christ, but he does it freely, taking no support so that all can see that nothing compels him to serve except for the transforming grace of God.

[27 : 30] I love that. The apostle Paul had a great ambition for his life. It was not almighty dollar. It was not a packed out 401k. It was the imperishable wreath.

It was a prize of the upward call of God. It was a crown of righteousness, which he references several times. It was to offer himself as a living sacrifice to the one who saved his soul.

I find it so striking. The way he thought, even though it meant embracing loss, hunger, weariness, poverty, and more, though it means forsaking his rights, forfeiting his rights, it was a great ambition of his life to preach the gospel.

Now, it just so happens today is 25th year, our 25th anniversary of becoming a Christian for me.

Now, I must speak honestly. I felt like as I was walking around this morning praying, just aware of how much of my life is unworthy of the Lord.

[28 : 41] and there's a lot of things I can't identify with the Apostle Paul, but this I can in ambition to live for Christ.

Freshly, this morning, I just renounced everything. Lord, I want to renounce it all. 25 years ago, he said, follow me, and that's what I've tried to do, and that's the same call I want to answer to the end of my life.

It just so happens that this month is 21 years of serving in full-time ministry. I must admit, serving the Lord is a strange way to make a living.

Because you're constantly asking yourself, is this really for the Lord? You know, if the last point was for you, to consider whether you're supporting gospel ministry appropriately, this point is for me.

For us, are we heeding these verses? Are we compelled to serve because of the transforming grace of God or because it pays the bills? And I want to quit the moment I serve because it pays the bills.

[30 : 12] I promise you. It's too hard to not quit for that reason. But, anyhow, enough about that. but when do we forfeit our rights?

Now, most arguments are fostered in the home because neither side wants to forfeit their rights.

I have a right to eat what I want. I have a right to peace and quiet. I have a right to watch the game without interruption. Don't you hate people that talk during the game?

I have a right to drink coffee and wake up before being kind. not that I've ever identified with that.

Now, there are some rights we should never forfeit.

We should never forfeit our allegiance to Jesus Christ above everything else. So, no matter what comes in our life, no matter what persecution arises in this country or any other country you travel in, we must not forfeit our allegiance to Jesus Christ.

[31:17] we must never forfeit our commitment to the local church biblically organizing our life around the gathered people of God. We should never forfeit our commitment to evangelism, to making disciples, to getting on mission with the Lord, but we should be willing to forfeit almost everything else.

Forfeit the right to spend your money how you want. Forfeit the right to spend your time how you want. I've been reading through the gospel of Luke lately and was struck by how Jesus has no concept for my time.

He is constantly interrupted. It's so striking. I think every prayer time for our Lord is interrupted by somebody needing something. So be careful how you view those interruptions.

Forfeit the right to spend your weekends how you want. Forfeit the right to spend your freedom how you want. Remember the context. The strong people are saying we've got a right to eat whatever we want.

Yeah, the weak were saying when you do that with no regard for me, you caused me to sin against God. So the true measure of freedom is not the ability to make a decision but the ability to not do it, not exercise.

[32:41] That's a true measure of freedom, not an exercise and the freedom but the ability to abstain wherever you need to abstain for the sake of other people. Forfeit the right to spend your life how you want.

D.A. Carson writing on these verses says, we must not stand on our rights. As long as defending our rights remains the load star that orders our priority, we cannot follow the way of the cross. Now, the load star, for anybody who's not a sailor like myself, is a star that was used to guide the ship. All the ship's course was directed by the load star and so he says that our rights must not be the guiding priority of our lives.

Rather, the gospel, the cross must be a life of self-denial willing to forfeit rights wherever appropriate. Point three, why should you at times forfeit your rights?

What are your rights? When should you forfeit your rights and why should you? What's the goal? What's the reason? What's the purpose?

[33:50] Throughout this book, Paul has defended his freedom. Everyone who is called in the Lord is a freed man in the Lord. You were bought with a price. You were rescued from the Lord to serve the Lord.

And he continues to do so here. Look in verse 9-1. He says, Am I not free? So he's referencing back so many other things he said about freedom.

Look at verse 19. Though I am free from all, so he acknowledges the gospel frees me from everything. It frees me from obviously the fear of future wrath, but it also frees me from pleasing any person.

Yeah, look what he says next. Though I'm free from all, I've made myself a servant of all. That gets Christian life right.

Christian life on the one hand says, I don't owe my neighbor anything. And yet it says, I owe my neighbor everything. So he continues, says, To the Jews I became a Jew.

[35:02] Those under the law I became one under the law. To those outside the law I became one outside the law. To the weak I became the weak. Now, Paul is not saying he's some sort of theological jellyfish with no backbone floating around in the sea like some Christians.

Rather, he's saying he's learned to distinguish the difference between the gospel and cultural implications. So the gospel wonderfully delivers us from obedience to the law as a way of gaining status before God.

Nevertheless, we're called to walk it out as a blueprint for holiness. But he's saying we don't obey the law anymore to gain a relationship with God. God does that through the gospel.

And so he's freed from the law. You'll notice he references being under the law of Christ. So he's no longer a Jew in that respect. He's no longer under the law in that respect. He's certainly not outside the law or any of these things.

What he's saying is he's learned to distinguish between what is essential to the gospel and what is its cultural expression. We see this worked out in the book of Acts several times with the apostle

Paul.

[36 : 10] If you remember with Timothy, when Timothy was converted, his dad was a Greek and he was going into a predominantly Jewish area and Paul had Timothy circumcised.

Now you're thinking he just said circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything. So what is he doing having Timothy circumcised? Well, he's having Timothy circumcised because he can come under that as a way of gaining access to preaching the gospel to these people now that he's freed from it.

Now we could draw out the implications of this all day long. But he's learned where to be flexible and where not to bend. Now while the church can sometimes be too flexible, far too often the church is inflexible.

One person that says the last seven words of the church will be, we've always done it that way before, right? Why do we do the things we do? Because we've always done it that way.

Churches begin to die when the inflexible things become the wrong things. It could be a certain program or a certain understanding of do's or don'ts, certain order of worship, a certain style of worship.

[37 : 24] We must realize the way we do church is much more cultural than it is biblical. Our church greetings are usually a handshake, sometimes a hug, but rarely a kiss, unlike other churches in the world.

Our churches begin at a specific time and end, generally at a specific time, unlike many churches in the world. Our churches include very little syncopation because we're mostly white and we can't sing in syncopation unlike many other churches of the world.

We could go on and on and on. Let us not just do the things we've always done before. Let's marry the mission, not the program.

Not the way of doing it. If you have a better way to do something, tell us because we're not married to things. So why is Paul so flexible?

Why does he take so much time to emphasize this? Why is Paul willing to give up everything? Why should we be willing to do so as well for people?

[38 : 37] Look down in verse 20 and 21. All these people are the ones referenced. To the Jews, I became a Jew in order to win Jews.

I became under the law in order to win those under the law. Those outside the law, I came outside it that I might win those outside the law. 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. The focus is not gaining a following but leading a following to gain Christ.

That's what Paul is all about. So the ultimate, the penultimate goal is the prize of the Lord. He's trying to gain these people in the process of doing so.

Paul alerts us to the great priority of the gospel in these verses. It's so radical. The way Paul thinks is that everything is shaped by the gospel.

[39 : 40] Everything is shaped. Look down in verse 23. He says, I do it all for the sake of the gospel that I may share with them in its blessing. It's so radical because he's interpreting everything in his life in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There's nowhere we need to think more clearly than as we think about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We must have a deep conviction about the exclusivity of the gospel.

Why is Paul so radical? Because he understands the exclusivity of the gospel. Sin's corruption is so severe that no one can know God apart from the gospel.

We're corrupted by sin, unable to free ourselves from sin. All humankind is in need of a savior. The exclusivity of the gospel means we see the utter emptiness of anything and everything else.

We are to see family and friends as they truly are apart from Christ. Not good southern people, not successful or unsuccessful, not beautiful or plain, but desperately in need of the gospel.

[40 : 56] That's what animated the apostle Paul. We must have a deep conviction about the urgency of the gospel. The gospel makes clear that salvation is found in Jesus Christ and in no one else.

calls all people to repent and turn to him. All who refuse to repent are storing up wrath. Romans 2, 5, that will be revealed from heaven for all who do not obey the gospel.

2 Thessalonians 1, when Christ comes again, the punishment will be eternal destruction. The only way to escape the wrath to come is through repenting now at the hearing of the gospel.

The exclusivity and the urgency of the gospel means the gospel is not only the most important message in all of history, it's the only essential message.

Man, it kicks over all the other ladders in our culture. The only thing that's essential for you to get is the gospel.

[41:56] and it's urgent. I offer you to the gospel of Jesus Christ this morning. The truth of the gospel is that if you have not repented and turned to Christ, the wrath of God, according to Jesus, John 3, 30, rests upon you.

God is not for you. God is against you. if you were to die tonight because of your many sins against him, because of many times you stiffened your neck and refused to obey his command, you would face not an eternity with your granddad and grandma or something like that.

You would face an eternity of damnation. And the truth of the gospel is that Jesus Christ stepped in to endure the wrath for those who would trust in him, to drain out the cup, so to speak, so that you and I could come to him.

Even while we're still sinners, the scripture says Christ died for the ungodly, and so I invite you to come. And I call you to respond to the urgency of this truth.

you must have deep conviction about the exclusivity, the urgency, and the sufficiency of the gospel. Yet we live in this culture that's losing its stinking mind and fear and anxiety and busyness and distraction.

[43:36] I don't want this to be a church that just floats along with it, but a church that lives in the good of the gospel by which we've been saved and are being saved and will be saved.

So don't fight for your right to do what you want. Fight for your right to lay down anything and everything for the sake of the gospel. What would it look like for the gospel to order your priorities and not your rights?

Your time, your money, your commitments, your weekends. You may have thought of that a few moments ago when Taylor came and gave us all these other things. If you're anything like me, you've got too many spinning plates, and yet this might be a time to really think about, are my plates, am I spinning the plates I should be spinning?

Is something risen in a priority? It shouldn't be. What would it look like to expend my life? All those opportunities aren't for all of us, but all of us are on a mission.

And some of us are called to respond to that in a few moments. Let us pray. Father in heaven, we thank you, we worship you, humble ourselves before you, we confess our need.

[44:55] Lord, we want to play it straight. We want to serve you, we want to live for you, we want to give our lives back. You died for us so that we might live for you.

And so help us, God, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, pastor at Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

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