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TEACHING CHRISTIAN LIBERTY AS IT RELATES TO
GOSPEL OUTREACH TO INDIAN HINDUS AT
LEGACY CHURCH, NOVI, MICHIGAN

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This project is dedicated to my dad, Ernst Klaus, now in heaven. While he was on the earth, my dad was a constant source of spiritual, emotional, and intellectual support. Together with my mom, he left a lasting impact on myself and all who knew him for the cause of Jesus Christ, and taught me the insatiable joy of learning.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|------|
| PREFACE..... | VII |
| INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| Context..... | 2 |
| Rationale..... | 4 |
| Purpose..... | 6 |
| Goals..... | 6 |
| Research Methodology..... | 6 |
| Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations..... | 8 |
| Conclusion..... | 9 |
| BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR THE PROJECT..... | 10 |
| Introduction..... | 10 |
| 1 Corinthians 8: Love Transcends Knowledge..... | 10 |
| Paul Introduces The Topic of Food Offered to Idols..... | 11 |
| Some People Take Idol Food Very Seriously..... | 13 |
| Weaker Christians Have a Salvation That Is in Doubt..... | 18 |
| 1 Corinthians 9: The Gospel Transcends Freedom..... | 20 |
| Paul Had a Fluid Relationship with the Mosaic Law..... | 20 |
| Paul’s Behavior Was Governed by His Concern for the Weaker Brother..... | 22 |
| Paul Was Self-Controlled in His Relationship to the Law and the Gospel..... | 23 |
| Paul’s Self-Control Increased the Influence of His Gospel Message..... | 25 |
| 1 Corinthians 10: Past Experiences Do Not Guarantee Future Success..... | 26 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Idolatry Is Demonically Motivated | 27 |
| Social Relationships Are Gospel Opportunities..... | 31 |
| The Christian Must Do All to the Glory of God | 34 |
| Conclusion | 35 |
| THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE PROJECT | 36 |
| Introduction | 36 |
| History of Hinduism..... | 38 |
| Overview of Hinduism..... | 42 |
| The Writings of Hinduism..... | 43 |
| Basic Philosophy of Hinduism..... | 45 |
| The Path of the Hindu | 50 |
| The Rituals of Hinduism | 53 |
| Summary of Hindu Thought | 54 |
| Hinduism in the United States..... | 55 |
| Summary and Strategy | 58 |
| DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT | 61 |
| Preparation | 61 |
| Implementation | 62 |
| Week 4: Sermon 1 | 62 |
| Week 5: Sermon 2 | 63 |
| Week 6: Sermon 3 | 63 |
| Week 7: Sermon 4 | 64 |
| Week 8: Sermon 5 | 65 |
| Week 9: Sermon 6 | 66 |
| Week 10: Sermon 7 | 66 |
| Week 11: Sermon 8 | 67 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| Week 12: Sermon 9 | 69 |
| Week 13: Sermon 10 | 70 |
| Post-Project Analysis | 71 |
| Ministry Plan Development | 71 |
| Conclusion | 72 |
| EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT | 73 |
| Introduction | 73 |
| Evaluation of the Project's Purpose | 74 |
| Evaluation of the Project's Goals | 74 |
| Goal 1: Christian Liberty Survey | 75 |
| Goal 2: Sermon Series | 75 |
| Goal 3: Intersection of Christian Liberty and Gospel Outreach | 76 |
| Goal 4: Outreach Ministry Plan | 79 |
| Strengths of the Project | 80 |
| Weaknesses of the Project | 82 |
| What I Would Do Differently | 84 |
| Theological Reflections | 84 |
| Personal Reflections | 86 |
| Conclusion | 88 |
| CHRISTIAN LIBERTY PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST SURVEYS | 89 |
| CHRISTIAN LIBERTY SERMON SERIES EVALUATION TOOL | 93 |
| CHRISTIAN LIBERTY MINISTRY PLAN EVALUATION TOOL | 95 |
| LONG-RANGE MINISTRY PLAN | 97 |
| SERMON SERIES EXTENDED OUTLINES | 103 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 156 |

PREFACE

As we get older, the phrase “standing on the shoulders of giants” carries more and more meaning. In this spirit, God has increasingly opened my eyes over the years to how much I need him and the positive influence of his servants in my life.

The various institutions which I have attended over my academic career have given me a broad perspective on theological presuppositions, hermeneutics, and conclusions, and have granted me a much deeper appreciation for those, whether in academia or not, who are sincere students of the Scriptures. I am especially indebted to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and my advisor, P. Chase Sears, for an excellent and thorough theological education; this has impacted me for the rest of my life.

I am also grateful to my longsuffering wife Rachel, and my beautiful children Matthew, Katelyn, and Christian, who have been so patient through this entire process. Most of all I am thankful to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, for giving my life and studies such rich meaning.

Ben Klaus

Novi, Michigan

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The culture of a local New Testament church has a profound impact on the gospel effectiveness of that church. One of the marks of a healthy church is a Great Commission vision, a deeply embedded motivation to reach the surrounding community with the gospel of Jesus Christ. This Great Commission vision is otherwise known as gospel outreach, and there are many specific facets to this vision; but in 1 Corinthians 8-10, Paul explains that there are a number of important implications to man's responsibility in the presentation of the gospel. Namely, God uses human instrumentation in the presentation of the gospel, and our gospel presentation must take into account the many hindrances and hurdles faced by those who would receive and accept the gospel message.

These are incredibly important truths for the church of Jesus Christ. In my experience, I have discovered that many churches are far more concerned with their own culture and spiritual experience than the spiritual sensitivities of those who are still dead in trespasses and sins. Paul explains that these priorities are backwards. A church that genuinely desires to win the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ will prioritize the spiritual sensitivities of those who are outside of the faith. This does not mean that Christian churches accommodate idolatry—far from it! Rather, it means that we remove all man-made hindrances to the gospel, so that lost people are able to focus on the gospel itself and not be distracted by tertiary things.

Context

Because of my personal experience pastoring and revitalizing a conservative, Independent Fundamental Baptist (IFB) church, as well as my growth as a serious exegete of the Scriptures, I have come to realize that there are a set of manmade values in play at many IFB churches. This sort of conservatism (exposed by Paul in numerous texts and demonstrated by Peter in Acts 10) may hinder or even be counterproductive to the work of the gospel.

Due in large part to this growing realization, I recently moved to a new ministry position: senior pastor of Legacy Church in Novi, Michigan. Legacy Church is a Southern Baptist church with a very interesting history. It is the recent merger of two churches of significantly different backgrounds: the First Baptist Church of Novi, which was a conservative IFB church, and Orchard Hills Baptist Church of Novi, a Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) church that was theologically conservative but slightly more progressive in methodology. These two congregations unified in 2015 on the campus of the First Baptist Church of Novi and renamed themselves *Legacy Church*. Shortly thereafter, the newly merged church sold the property of Orchard Hills Baptist Church and used the financial proceeds to conduct a complete renovation of the new facility, which was in desperate need. At the completion of the renovation, the former pastor relocated to a church in Florida, and Legacy spent the next twelve months prayerfully searching for a pastor. God providentially called me to Legacy Church at this time.

As I became acquainted with Legacy and began my ministry here, what was immediately noticeable to me about the church was that, while it is theologically conservative, the man-centered and issues-based conservatism with which I had been raised was not present. In addition, Legacy is a church with a passion to reach its growing community with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and this was a significant part of our conversations during the interview process. But the membership of Legacy has communicated that, while there is a desire to evangelize and disciple through biblical

means, there is a lack of understanding as to how these things may be effectively accomplished. So there is a real need to teach God’s truth regarding biblical strategies that are both permissible and effective in gospel outreach.

The gospel opportunities in Novi are incredible. Novi is consistently included in the list of the fastest-growing communities in Michigan,¹ and it is easily the largest of the fastest-growing communities in Michigan. This growth is spurred by a diversity of ethnic and religious groups, and, in certain cases, the ethnic and religious subgroups are organically related to one another. Demographic studies reveal that 63 percent of Novi is White, and 22 percent of Novi is Asian. The Asian demographic is primarily divided into Indian and Japanese ethnicities.

There are major religious connotations to these demographic studies. Novi has a high percentage of professing Catholics, at 25 percent. The vast majority of these professing Catholics appear to be White Americans. Conversely, the percentage of professing Baptists in Novi is abnormally low, at 2.4 percent.² The demographic subgroups of Indian and Japanese ethnicities find a parallel percentage of professing Hindus and Shinto-Taoists, although many of them are nonpracticing and essentially atheistic. In short, Novi is a fast-growing and vibrant community with a complex mixture of ethnic and religious components.

Legacy has not kept faithful attendance records for the last number of years. However, the anecdotal evidence suggests that the church has been in a pattern of decline, despite the community population boom in recent decades and the recent merger of the two churches. At the beginning of this project, the church had an average

¹ Ken Haddad, “These Are the Fastest Growing Michigan Cities in 2020.” Accessed August 14, 2020. <https://www.clickondetroit.com/news/michigan/2020/01/27/these-are-the-fastest-growing-michigan-cities-in-2020/>.

² Best Places. “2020 Compare Cities Religion: Novi vs. Milford.” Accessed August 14, 2020. https://www.bestplaces.net/compare-cities/novi_mi/milford_mi/religion.

attendance (pre-COVID) of 40-50 on a Sunday morning. This declining attendance, conjoined to the population growth in our community, clearly points to a real need on the part of Legacy Church to reach the community with the gospel; both for the sake of the future of the church, as well as the tremendous spiritual need in the community.

Rationale

A church in decline may recapture a sense of gospel purpose and effectiveness by paying careful attention to the biblical relationship between gospel outreach and fruit from that outreach. In 1 Corinthians 8-10, Paul discusses in detail the tensions between gospel presentation by the church and its reception by an idolatrous community. Paul explains in these chapters that Christian liberty is a central tenant to his evangelistic and discipleship endeavors. In this context, Paul deals with liberties that mature Christians enjoyed but may have been objectionable to younger, more immature Christians for a variety of reasons.

Paul organically connects these concepts to his central purpose of gospel effectiveness. While Paul is a champion of divine sovereignty in salvation, he still emphasizes the fact that God uses human instruments to accomplish his salvific purposes. Paul explains that the behavior of the Christian may have a positive or negative impact on his own gospel witness, so there is a direct “cause and effect” relationship between our knowledge, understanding, and application of Christian liberty and our gospel impact in our communities. In fact, this becomes the knife’s edge of church revitalization. Where a church insists on maintaining cultural norms from generations ago to appease a shrinking and graying congregation, there is a strong likelihood that the church will soon die. But when a church biblically evaluates its values and mission and determines to sacrifice certain preferences for the sake of the gospel, a spark of gospel effectiveness may be powerfully rekindled. A willingness to appropriately sacrifice personal preferences reveals an authentic focus on Christ and the gospel.

Legacy Church is full of sincere, Bible-focused Christians. They are not nearly as burdened with a sense of man-centered, humanly-derived piety as some of my former churches. However, at Legacy there is a great need to understand both sides of Christian liberty. Christian liberty is not limited merely to behaviors that are permitted by merit of the gospel and our freedom in Christ but perhaps even more profoundly applies to what ought to be willingly sacrificed for the sake of the gospel. This points to the necessity of authentic gospel outreach. During the interview process, the pastoral search committee expressed to me several times that the church is a work of renewal and revitalization. There is a tremendous desire in the church to reach the community with the gospel.

Furthermore, as we have previously demonstrated, our community is rapidly growing, with a widely-divergent ethnic population. The New Testament principles of “Christian liberty” are particularly apropos for the local Indian population that largely comes from a background of Hinduism with idolatrous sensibilities that would have mirrored, in many respects, Paul’s own Greco-Roman audience.³ There is also a significant number of Catholics in the community whose religious sensibilities may mirror the sensibilities of Paul’s Jewish audience.⁴ Therefore, our purpose and rationale is to take the principles of Christian liberty as they apply to gospel outreach and implement them in our gospel mission here in Novi. In order to place appropriate delimitations on this project, we are committed to applying Paul’s principles of Christian liberty in gospel outreach particularly to the Indian Hindu population of Novi; there are presently no former Hindus in our congregation. The rationale for church growth, or in this context “church revitalization,” is required to be thoroughly biblical; thus, the motivation for this

³ Neighborhood Scout. “Novi, MI Demographics and Population Statistics.” Accessed August 14, 2020. <https://www.neighborhoodscout.com/mi/novi/demographics>. Accessed August 14, 2020. Notice that the Indian and far Eastern population are included as one grouping under the heading of *Asian*.

⁴ Best Places. “Religion in Novi, MI.” Accessed August 14, 2020. <https://www.bestplaces.net/religion/city/michigan/novi>. According to this resource, fully one fourth of the population of Novi is Catholic.

project is to develop a model for church revitalization and gospel outreach that is spiritually substantive, rather than simplistically pragmatic. We find the principles of Christian liberty to be at the heart of our desire to reach our community with the gospel in a biblically authentic fashion.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to increase the understanding of Christian liberty among members of Legacy Church in Novi, Michigan, in order to more effectively communicate the gospel to Indian Hindus in our community.

Goals

The following goals comprised the strategy devised to facilitate a comprehensive understanding and application of Christian liberty in its organic relationship to evangelism, discipleship, and church revitalization.

1. The first goal was to assess the current level of understanding of Christian liberty among the membership of Legacy Church.
2. The second goal was to present a ten-part sermon series on the issue of gospel-centered Christian liberty in our Sunday morning worship services.
3. The third goal was to increase the understanding of the congregation of Legacy Church regarding the intersection of Christian liberty and gospel outreach.
4. The fourth goal was to develop a ministry plan to increase gospel outreach to the Indian Hindu community of Novi.

A specific research methodology was created to measure the successful completion of these four goals.⁵ This methodology is described in the following section.

⁵ All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of these four goals. The first goal was to assess the current level of understanding of Christian liberty among the membership of Legacy Church. This goal was measured by administering the “Christian Liberty Survey” to at least thirty adult members of Legacy Church.⁶ This goal was considered to be successfully met when at least twenty surveys were completed and returned, yielding a clearer picture of the understanding of Christian liberty among the membership of Legacy Church.

The second goal was to present a ten-part sermon series on the issue of gospel-centered Christian liberty in our Sunday morning worship services. This goal was measured by a panel of five leaders of Legacy Church, using a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance of the sermon series.⁷ This goal was considered to be successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, the material was to be revised until it met the standard.

The third goal was to increase the understanding of the congregation of Legacy Church regarding the intersection of Christian liberty and gospel outreach. This goal was measured by administering a post survey, used to measure the change in understanding of Christian liberty among the congregation of Legacy Church.⁸ The goal was considered to be met successfully when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

The fourth goal was to develop a ministry plan to increase gospel outreach to the Indian Hindu community of Novi. This ministry plan accounted both for liberties that

⁶ See appendix 1.

⁷ See appendix 2.

⁸ See appendix 1.

ought to be exercised for the sake of the gospel and liberties that ought to be sacrificed for the sake of the gospel, taking into account the specific spiritual sensitivities of the local Indian Hindu population. This goal was to be measured by a panel of five leaders of Legacy Church, utilizing a rubric to evaluate the functionality of the plan, communication processes, training elements, provision of appropriate resources, and the action steps.⁹ The goal would be considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, the material would be revised until it met the standard.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definition of a key term was used in the ministry project. *Christian liberty* may be defined as “the right to make a decision based on biblical teaching and in agreement with a mature conscience.”¹⁰ This definition particularly concerns issues of no inherent morality. Such a decision, however, may be loaded with tertiary concerns, namely the impact of such a decision on other people who are not Christians or are weak in faith.

There were two delimitations to this project. First, the project was limited to sixteen weeks, including an assessment survey, sermon series, and ensuing ministry plan. The implementation of the ministry plan extends beyond the timeframe of this project. Secondly, this project was conducted in English and focused on the local English-speaking Indian population.

⁹ See appendix 3.

¹⁰ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*: New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2000): 649.

Conclusion

When a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ and is born again, this is clear evidence of the miraculous, regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. However, God is pleased to bring about His saving work through human means. God's servants are used by God to deliver the gospel message and plant the gospel seed. Paul emphasizes that the way that we go about planting these gospel seeds has a direct bearing on the fruit that does or does not come from the gospel, and churches that are serious about the gospel do well to take these principles to heart.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR CHRISTIAN LIBERTY AS IT RELATES TO GOSPEL OUTREACH

Introduction

In 1 Corinthians 8-10, Paul teaches that as the mature Christian exercises personal liberty, he must assess the impact of that liberty on another person's conscience. This is especially true for the conscience of one who is "weak" (1 Cor. 8:7). Paul's teaching has many implications for gospel work in our society and leads to a number of theological and ethical questions. This chapter will trace Paul's arguments, seeking to answer the theological and ethical questions and appropriately reframe these principles for our own historical and cultural context.

1 Corinthians 8: Love Transcends Knowledge

First Corinthians 8 governs the values of mature Christians by demonstrating that love transcends knowledge. Paul addresses an issue that is commonly known as "Christian liberty."¹ He approaches this issue from the perspective of the dietary habits of the Corinthians. In the greater context of chapters 8-10, Paul's main point is that returning to idolatry is a constant danger, so whatever conclusions we draw from chapter 8 must be harmonized with the greater context.

¹ Andrew David Naselli and J. D. Crowley, *Conscience. What It Is, How to Train It, and Loving Those Who Differ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 132.

Paul Introduces the Topic of Food Offered to Idols (vv. 1-6)

Paul introduces the topic of food offered to idols by stating that “we all have knowledge” (v. 1). There is an immediate question of whether Paul is quoting a Corinthian slogan or presenting his own point of view.² A full discussion of this possibility is outside the purview of this chapter, but I do note that this possibility raises multiple tensions theologically and practically throughout chapters 8-10. As PHEME PERKINS states, “It remains difficult to determine how much of what follows represents questions from the church in Corinth and how much is Paul’s own reflection on the issue.”³ ROY CIAMPA states that a conclusive answer to this question is likely out of reach, and “the difference does not greatly affect our exegesis.”⁴ One page later, Ciampa says, “Paul is probably affirming that all Christians have some knowledge that they share in common.”⁵ This places the Corinthians’ knowledge in a largely positive light, even though it did carry negative side-effects at times. I agree with Ciampa; the question of the “Corinthian slogan” may never be fully decided, but a clear understanding of the text is attainable, regardless of how the slogan question is answered.

Paul explains in verse 1 that knowledge is good and essential, but it must be held in balance by love. Increased knowledge naturally carries several negative side effects: arrogance, self-aggrandizement, and a smug attitude of superiority. The irony of this is that the proper response to increased knowledge ought to be increased humility, as

² Craig S. Keener, *First and Second Corinthians*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2005), 73.

³ PHEME PERKINS, *First Corinthians*. Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012): 215.

⁴ ROY E. CIAMPA and BRIAN S. ROSNER, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2010): 834.

⁵ CIAMPA and ROSNER, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 835.

we encounter God Himself and are enabled by His Holy Spirit to understand more of His glory. Yet, as Paul explains, such a humble response is not frequently the case.

For the Corinthians, the admonition about the negative side effects of knowledge would have been startling, given the educated society of Corinth and its reputation for intellectual advancement.⁶ So Paul shows us that, as we grow in knowledge, we must also grow in love and compassion toward others who join us on the road of spiritual maturity, rather than belittling them for what they may not know or understand. These spiritual traits will frame the entire conversation of chapters 8-10.

Paul makes an incisive statement in verses 2-3; the one who believes that he has knowledge or that he has attained an acceptable level of God-competency manifests true ignorance. One of the chief characteristics of the child of God is an enduring desire to know Him better. There must be no smug self-satisfaction in our knowledge of God. Rather, love is the chief characteristic of the Christian. In other words, knowledge is good and necessary, but love for God and for our fellow Christians is even better.

Having made the introductory statements above, Paul now examines the issue of food offered to idols. The phrase “food offered to idols” (v. 4) is the Greek phrase τῆς βρώσεως οὗν τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων and refers to food set before idols in cultic worship.⁷ While such a practice is unusual in western society, it is normal in other contemporary cultures and was very common in the first century.⁸ Paul puts this idolatrous rite in perspective in verse 4; it is a sham and an illusion. There is nothing real about it. To use a contemporary metaphor, it is like setting out cookies and milk for Santa Claus or like

⁶ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011): 255.

⁷ Thomas R. Schreiner, *First Corinthians*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018): 167-68.

⁸ Schreiner, *I Corinthians*, 167-68.

putting a tooth under the pillow for the tooth fairy. There is no other God but one. While there are other supernatural forces at work (10:19-21), these forces are not truly gods, nor can they even begin to approach the one true God in power and authority. Paul will expand on this important idea in chapter 10.

Paul continues his argument in verses 5-6 that, even though there are many imaginary gods, there is only one true God. God is the creator and sustainer of all, so we are called to worship Him alone. Paul is setting up his argument to follow on these two axioms: correct knowledge informs us that there is only one God, and love for God and others is the proper expression of correct knowledge. Knowledge that does not produce loving behavior is immature and insufficient.

Some People Take Idol Food Very Seriously (vv. 7-10)

In verse 7, we come to the heart of the issue, as Paul deals with those who possess a weak conscience. While Paul's monotheistic theology is clearly correct (v. 4), many new Christians had come out of a background of idolatrous polytheism (v. 7).⁹ They had rejected idolatrous polytheism in favor of biblical monotheism, but the implications of idolatry are fresh in their minds and consciences. This affected their mentality of life and worship. Charles Barrett says,

There are in Corinth men who have eaten sacrificed food all their lives, and have always thought of it as sacrificed to an idol having real existence and thus bearing real spiritual significance and force. In becoming Christians they have not ceased to believe in the reality of the spiritual beings behind idols, and have accordingly not ceased to think of the food itself as having religious meaning. They are weak.¹⁰

⁹ Verlyn D. Verbrugge and Murray J. Harris. *1 and 2 Corinthians*. The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008): 257, 260.

¹⁰ Charles K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1968): 194.

Schreiner agrees: “The ‘weak’ in 1 Corinthians were former pagans who were accustomed to idolatry and felt defiled by it” (1 Cor. 8:7, 10, 12).¹¹

A weak conscience may be compared to a wound which is healing. If a person has sustained a deep incision from surgery and now has many stitches binding it together, he is thankful to have his health once again, but there is a heightened sensitivity in the area which was cut. This is what Paul means when he talks about the weak conscience: there is a high level of spiritual sensitivity which will heal in time, but is not yet fully healed. In a very real sense, when God saves a person, He does spiritual surgery on the soul. While a person is deeply grateful for the life-giving work of God, he will continue to be sensitive about a number of issues as he matures spiritually.

Paul is referring to the sensitivities of new Christians; this is why he says that some eat food as really offered to an idol (v. 7). There is only one true God, and even a new Christian must acknowledge this, or he would not be a Christian (v. 6). But all the implications of their former lives of idolatry have not been worked out of his soul. While his mind says one thing, his hearts and consciences are in conflict. For such a person, eating food that had been previously offered in worship to an idol presents a moral dilemma because of the implications. As David Garland says, “certain actions trigger old memories and associations.”¹² So Paul presses into this dilemma.

Beginning in verse 8, Paul deals with the theology of Christian liberty and food offered to idols. Paul says that those who eat are no better, and those who do not eat are no worse. Practically speaking, it does not matter if the food was or was not offered to idols. This concept provides us with a simple definition of Christian liberty: some things simply do not matter. To bind up an innate morality in these issues is to harmfully bind the consciences of God’s people. But Paul is making an even greater point here: there are

¹¹ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 164.

¹² David E. Garland, *First Corinthians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003): 380.

times that our exercise of legitimate Christian liberty might cause harm to new Christians, and this should never happen (v. 9).

In verse 10, Paul introduces us to one of two thorny issues in the text. Paul implies that the mature Christian is not only eating food offered to an idol, but he may even go into the temple of the idol and eat there. This leads to two major questions: (1) Were Christians actually eating idol food in the temple? (2) If so, was it possible that this eating was not an act of idolatrous worship?

David Garland affirms that this eating may indeed have taken place in the temple but not as an act of worship:

Occasions for eating in connection with an idol or on the premises of an idol's temple were numerous. The celebrations of many cults were closely bound up with civic and social life because religion and politics were indivisible in ancient Hellenistic city life....Individuals might also receive private invitations to a banquet at a temple....Temple banqueting rooms could be rented out for private functions, like church halls today that are rented out for receptions. Several extant invitations beckon guests to attend banquets in a temple dining room commemorating a variety of rites of passage: weddings, childbirth, birthdays, coming of age parties, election victories, and funerals.¹³

Charles Barrett makes a similar case, explaining that the stronger Christians of Corinth felt liberty to eat in the temple with the knowledge that idols are nothing.¹⁴ Craig Blomberg agrees that it was lawful for the “strong” to eat in the temple, because it was possible to do so without religious ritual.¹⁵ Finally, Roy Ciampa goes into some detail describing the same scenario.¹⁶ I agree with these scholars; Corinthian Christians had the legitimate right to eat idol food in a variety of settings, which would include secular celebrations within the temple precincts.

¹³ Garland, *First Corinthians*, 348.

¹⁴ Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 196.

¹⁵ Craig L. Blomberg, *First Corinthians*. The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994): 236.

¹⁶ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 859-60.

Other scholars disagree. For example, Thomas Schreiner states that Paul “uses the word ‘right’ ironically in v. 9, and thus he has in mind the ‘so-called right’ of the knowers.”¹⁷ To strengthen his position, Schreiner says that “There is universal condemnation of eating food offered to idols in the New Testament...and in early church history, with no exceptions.”¹⁸ He goes a little further: “The ‘right’ to eat in 8:9 is followed up immediately by a reference to eating in idols’ temples, but we know from 10:19-22...that eating in such temples is forbidden; thus we have good exegetical reasons for thinking that the ‘right’ here is ironic.”¹⁹ His conclusion is that knowingly eating food offered to idols is always wrong.²⁰

Schreiner’s argument requires a thoughtful response, and I object on several grounds. First, it seems to minimize Paul’s contrast between “strong” and “weak.” In Schreiner’s exegesis, the “weak” are the ones who, by merit of abstaining from idol food, are theologically and practically correct in this issue, while the “strong” are the ones who, by merit of eating idol food, are theologically and practically incorrect. Yet, in Paul’s argument, the “weak” are the ones in danger of stumbling away from the Christian faith (v. 9). It does not seem to follow that Christians with correct doctrine and practice are the closest to apostasy.

Second, Schreiner’s interpretation demands an ironic reading of Paul’s intent behind his plain statement. In other words, we are required to read Paul in the opposite sense of what he actually says. This is difficult because Paul gives no clear indication here that he intends irony. Marion Soards vocalizes this difficulty in brief:

“Interpretations that attempt to read the situation behind these remarks do not find

¹⁷ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 175.

¹⁸ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 175.

¹⁹ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 176.

²⁰ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 163.

sufficient evidence in the wording to make a definitive case.”²¹ Furthermore, such a practice creates hermeneutical conundrums everywhere, as interpreters struggle to discern what Paul intended at face value and what he intended to be understood in the opposite sense. For example, when Paul says in 9:3-7 that he has the “right to eat and drink,” the “right to be married,” and the “right to make a living from his gospel work,” does he intend that literally or ironically? I believe that all of these rights are literal and legitimate, which would be the simplest and clearest understanding of Paul’s words.

Third, the implication of Schreiner’s argument seems to be that the scenarios of 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 are identical because they both include eating food in the temple. At the very least, he argues that the lines between sacred and secular activities were blurred.²² But we have it on good authority that Paul does indeed have two distinct scenarios in view, even though idol food is being eaten in the temple in both cases.²³ This issue will be examined in greater detail in the discussion of chapter 10. Finally, Schreiner states (as above) that eating food offered to idols is universally condemned in the New Testament and the patristics with no exceptions.²⁴ However, 1 Corinthians 8-10, the longest and clearest passage on this issue, would seem to be a significant exception.

So I conclude that the Corinthian Christians were eating food offered to idols, and, at times, they were eating in the temple. This was one means of engagement in social discourse and interaction. In his reasoning, Paul acknowledges that these activities were legitimate, but such liberty is not the whole story.

²¹ Marion L. Soards, *1 Corinthians*. Understanding the Bible Commentary Series. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999): 288.

²² Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 163.

²³ Dan Nighswander, *1 Corinthians*. Believer’s Church Bible Commentary. (Harrisonburg, VA: 2017): 341.

²⁴ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 175.

Paul teaches us that the weaker brother has not worked through the implications of meat offered to idols, but, because of the example of the stronger brother, may trample on the pricks of his own conscience. Instead of going through the time-consuming process of spiritual maturation, the weaker Christian short-circuits the discipleship process and may even return to his idolatrous ways. In fact, Anthony Thiselton makes a good case that the “strong” Christians of Corinth were going into the temple deliberately, so as to goad the faith of the weak.²⁵ The public exercise of liberty on the part of the stronger Christian awakened a desire within the immature Christian to return to his old life of idolatry.²⁶

Weaker Christians Have a Salvation That Is in Doubt (vv. 11-13)

This brings us to the second thorny issue in the text: Paul implies that the ultimate salvation of the weaker brother is in doubt (v. 11). There is significant soteriological tension here. Either the weaker Christian is a regenerate Christian who is secure in his salvation, or he is not a regenerate Christian and is still under condemnation. Fee acknowledges this tension: “In saying that the brother or sister is destroyed, Paul most likely is referring to eternal loss, not simply some internal falling apart because one is behaving contrary to the dictates of conscience....For such people to return to idolatry meant to come back under its power and thus suffer eternal loss.”²⁷ Roy Ciampa argues that “the metaphor of the stumbling block was used in the New Testament...to describe an obstacle that keeps someone from finding their way to ultimate salvation.”²⁸ B. J.

²⁵ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 651.

²⁶ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 652.

²⁷ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2014): 428.

²⁸ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 858.

Oropeza states the issue plainly: “This person’s faith is ruined as he abandons the one true God to worship idol deities again, and this eventually results in his condemnation on judgment day.”²⁹ Schreiner acknowledges this possible interpretation by his question, “Can someone for whom Christ died be eternally destroyed?”³⁰

Other scholars frame Paul’s statement differently. For example, Blomberg and Verbrugge do not view this “destruction” as eternal damnation but rather as “an obstacle to Christian sanctification.”³¹ In considering the data, I conclude that Paul does mean that a weaker brother is likely to fall away from the faith and be destroyed because of the negative influence of the “stronger brother.”³² Paul does not press into the theological question of eternal security and perseverance in this context but merely states the very real danger of eternal condemnation.

In verses 12 and 13, Paul clarifies the statements he had just made in verse 11: our actions and attitudes as mature Christians greatly impact the faith of others. In the final estimation, salvation is of the Lord. But God uses human means to accomplish His purpose, and Paul says we may actually hinder God’s plan of redemption. Mature Christians who selfishly flaunt their liberties are offending Christ Himself. Finally, having carefully considered all these factors, Paul declares his own determination: to never again eat meat, we presume at least publicly, so as to never run the risk of offending a weaker brother. This is his example, not command, but through this Paul touches on the very heart of true Christian liberty: love is greater than knowledge.

²⁹ B. J. Oropeza, *First Corinthians*. New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017): 257.

³⁰ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 178.

³¹ Blomberg, *First Corinthians*, 236; Verbrugge, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 262.

³² Oropeza, *First Corinthians*, 257.

1 Corinthians 9: The Gospel Transcends Freedom

1 Corinthians 9 governs the values of mature Christians by demonstrating that effective gospel outreach transcends personal freedom. For sake of brevity, we will summarize Paul’s lessons from 9:1-18. In verses 1-14, Paul poses a series of rhetorical questions and situations regarding apostolic employment; he says that he has the “right” to earn a living wage from his gospel work, but he deferred this right for the sake of gospel effectiveness (vv. 11-12). His literal use of the word “right” resonates with the same use of the word in 8:9. He also uses the word “right” in a literal fashion in 9:4-5. In verses 15-18, Paul focuses on his apostolic call and commission to preach the gospel. Because his gospel work is a divine calling and not merely a career, he is glad to do anything for the sake of gospel effectiveness, including working a secular job to pay the bills (vv. 15-18). After giving these other illustrations regarding Christian liberty, he returns to a more direct conversation on the topic in verse 19.

Paul Had a Fluid Relationship with the Mosaic Law (vv. 19-21)

Paul reaffirms his statement from verse 19 that he is free from all men. This statement has numerous meanings, and Paul evidently intends all of them.³³ Paul is free in the sense that he was never a slave, he is spiritually free in that he possesses the same Christian liberties as all Christians, and he is free from the constraints of worrying about financial compensation for his spiritual work (vv. 1-18)—thus removing an impediment to his message.

Even though he is free, he also says that he is the slave of all, and he gives specifics about the nature of his “slavery.” First, he became a Jew to the Jews. Charles Barrett explains this by saying that “[Paul’s] Judaism was no longer of his very being, but

³³ William Baker, *1 Corinthians*. Cornerstone Bible Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. 2009): 324.

a guise he could adopt or discard at will.”³⁴ I agree with Barrett. At times, Paul publicly submitted himself to the Mosaic law for the sake of testimony, so as not to cause an unnecessary stumbling block to the gospel for practicing Jews. He explained this idea clearly at the end of chapter 8: even though he possessed the liberty to eat idol food, he determined not to do so. In other texts such as Acts 16:3, 18:18, and 2 Corinthians 11:27, Paul fasted, took the vow of the Nazirite, encouraged Timothy to be circumcised, or in other ways submitted himself to the Mosaic Law, as indicated at the end of verse 20.

But when Paul was among the Gentiles, he did not submit himself to the Mosaic law (9:21). Paul adds an important stipulation in verse 21: Christians are not libertines or hedonists. There is always a law in force to govern our behavior, but it is the law of Christ (as explicated by Christ and the apostles), not the Mosaic law.³⁵ Paul’s implication in verses 20-21 is that he lived this way, so that his lifestyle resonated with the authenticity of the gospel among whomever he lived, Jew or Gentile. He is not emphasizing the joys of self-gratification but rather its sacrifice; he is not living in a way which he even necessarily enjoyed or desired in a human sense but rather in a fashion which was understood by his countrymen and helped them accept the message of the gospel.

So in verse 20 he submitted himself to the Mosaic law when with the Jews, so as not to offend; in verse 21, he disregarded the Mosaic law when with the Gentiles, so as not to confuse. Barrett gives a helpful synopsis.

Paul can adopt his varying attitude—to the Jews as a Jew, to the Gentiles as a Gentile—because he recognizes not a smaller but a greater debt to God than legalism implies. He is not related to God by legal observance, but by grace and

³⁴ Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 211.

³⁵ Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law*. New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, no date given): 181.

faith, and in Christ only; but precisely in this non-legal relationship he is Christ's slave, who owes absolute obedience not to a code...but to Christ as a person.³⁶

This is deeply moving because it clarifies why Paul was a slave to the gospel. He was not a slave of forced subjugation but a slave of love and willing submission.

Paul's Behavior Was Governed by His Concern for the Weaker Brother (vv. 21-24)

Paul returns to his verbiage of "the weak" in verse 22; these are the ones with weak consciences, as explained in 8:7-13. Paul is assisting them in their faith journey by avoiding behaviors that would cause them to stumble in their spiritual journey. When Paul says he became all things to all men, he is saying that he gave up all legitimate liberties which could have caused a gospel impediment. This does not mean that Paul was a chameleon; rather, he was a selfless servant. Whatever sacrifice was necessary to make the gospel meaningful and compelling, Paul was willing to make it. Thus, his primary goal was to be effective in his gospel message, and in this way effective gospel outreach transcended his personal freedoms.³⁷

Toward the end of chapter 9, Paul binds up these thoughts into one unified whole, and he does so by introducing another powerful metaphor. The image and metaphor of the Olympic athlete was known to all and understood by all in the Corinthian church.³⁸ It is easily understood by contemporary audiences as well. The first athletic metaphor which Paul mentions in verse 24 is the race.

Paul will speak to the matter of preparation in a moment, but, in verse 24, he refers to the actual competition itself. When it is time for the race to begin, he explains, the competitors are not troubled by endless other distracting trivialities; it is time to focus on that one thing and to make the moment matter more than anything else. So Paul says

³⁶ Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 214.

³⁷ Oropeza, *First Corinthians*, 268.

³⁸ Garland, *First Corinthians*, 439.

that the moment of the competition is the moment for absolute focus and effort.

At the end of verse 24, Paul speaks to the ultimate motivation in competition: the prize granted to the winner. While the tangible prize for early Olympic winners was insignificant (such as an olive branch or woven crown), the attendant prizes were spectacular. Olympic or athletic champions were assured lives of luxury and privilege; they won financial sponsorships, the adulation of their fans, and many other privileges.³⁹ So the actual prize in competition was humble but was not representative of all of the prizes available to them.

Paul Was Self-Controlled in His Relationship to the Law and the Gospel (vv. 25-26)

Paul continues in verse 25 to describe the multiple levels of competition. There is the level of the competition itself, as in the race day; but there is the far deeper and even more difficult level of preparation for the event. Paul speaks to this here: athletes who intend to do well on the day of the competition must strenuously train far in advance, so that their minds and bodies are prepared for peak performance in the moment of competition.

In verse 27, Paul uses the word “discipline,” meaning “to exercise self-control.”⁴⁰ It is the voluntary giving up of some things to which we may be entitled, in order to gain a greater benefit—a word that perfectly captures the entire message of chapters 8-9. This is where Paul’s argument turns more directly to the principles of Christian liberty. In the context of chapters 8-10, Paul is teaching that the Christian doesn’t do things just because he wants to. Rather, legitimate liberties must be assessed for their impact on gospel witness.

³⁹ Paul Christesen and Donald G. Kyle. *A Companion to Sport and Spectacle in Greek and Roman Antiquity, First Ed.* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2014): 31-32.

⁴⁰ Oropeza, *First Corinthians*, 271.

So there is the matter of physical training in the particular exercise, such as running or boxing; then there is the matter of mental training; then there is the matter of self-restraint toward behaviors detrimental to the goal. Gordon Fee says, “Any athlete entered in the games was required to go into ten months of strict training and was subject to disqualification if he failed to do so.”⁴¹ Garland quotes the ancient philosopher Epictetus in saying, “Those who say ‘I wish to win an Olympic victory’ must consider the demanding task before them: ‘You have to submit to discipline, follow a strict diet, give up sweet-cakes, train under compulsion, at a fixed hour, in heat or in cold; you must not drink cold water, nor wine just whenever you feel like it.’”⁴² Garland also cites Tertullian: “Athletes are set apart for more rigid training to apply themselves to the building up of their physical strength. They are kept from lavish living, from more tempting dishes, from more pleasurable drinks. They are urged on, they are subjected to tortuous toils, they are worn out. The more strenuously they have exerted themselves, the greater is their hope of victory.”⁴³

Paul continues to explain that, just like an athlete, he is living his life with great purpose. In truth, he is actually living with far greater purpose than any athlete because the competition in which he is engaged is spiritual and eternal. The souls of men and women hang in the balance. To drive home his point, Paul refers specifically to two athletic metaphors in verse 26—running and boxing. The phrase “running with uncertainty,” in the words of Gordon Fee, “can only mean ‘as one who has no fixed goal.’ People who enter races, of course, do not do such things; thus, the absurdity of the metaphor makes its own point.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 482.

⁴² Garland, *First Corinthians*, 439.

⁴³ Garland, *First Corinthians*, 441.

⁴⁴ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 483.

In his metaphor of “fighting, as one that beats the air,” Paul is referencing the sport of boxing, which was very common in the first century. According to Ciampa, this is probably not a reference to shadow boxing. Rather, Paul is referring to the vanity of constant feints in the ring, without actually engaging the opponent and landing blows. A boxer can play defense the entire fight, seeking to avoid engagement, but he will lose.⁴⁵ These behaviors, aimless running and defensive boxing, were the opposite of Paul’s strategy—he had entered the competition to win, and he intended to do whatever it would take to win.

Paul’s Self-Control Increased the Influence of His Gospel Message (v. 27)

In verse 27, Paul provides the lynchpin of this entire passage, going back to chapter 8. Paul’s main concern is that, as he preaches the gospel, the recipient has no reason based on Paul’s lifestyle to reject the gospel. In fact, based on Paul’s lifestyle, the recipient of the gospel message has every compelling reason to accept the gospel message! Far from being a detriment to the gospel, Paul’s lifestyle was incredibly convicting for the lost person. So, Paul says, “I discipline my body;” or literally, I “strike a blow to my own body, I make it my slave,” in reference to the sport of boxing, which he had just mentioned.⁴⁶ Paul is not advocating physical self-flagellation but rather of being concerned to not coddle the whimsical desires of the flesh. This is the mortification of the flesh, putting to death the flesh with its affections and lusts. There is real spiritual toughness here—the ability to stand and compete in the face of great adversity.

At the end of verse 27, the word for disqualified is ἀδόκιμος, meaning “not

⁴⁵ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 929.

⁴⁶ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 929.

standing the test, unqualified, worthless, base of person.”⁴⁷ Paul uses this term as an example to the Corinthians because he “fears that the Corinthians will fall short and fall by the wayside in the race...because of their contact with idolatry.”⁴⁸ Paul seems to be making the point that one of the main reasons that Christians do not share the gospel is that they are truly hypocrites.⁴⁹ For Paul, the gospel could not be more deadly serious. Its truths had gripped his soul and transformed his life. The truth of the gospel had not made Paul physically rich but poor; it had not made his life more comfortable but more difficult; it had not made him more popular but hated by his peers; it did not extend his earthly life but shortened it. Yet it was the very truth of the gospel, the life-giving work of Jesus Christ, that compelled Paul to give up everything that this world had to offer and instead live entirely for the world to come.

Paul’s lessons about Christian liberty resonate deeply with contemporary American evangelicalism. Paul could not be more single-minded in his focus on gospel outreach and the sacrifices necessary to be effective in his gospel goals; thus, he serves as a profound example for those of us who share this vision. Gospel effectiveness is attainable, but it requires a high level of personal commitment and personal sacrifice.

1 Corinthians 10: Past Experiences Do Not Guarantee Future Success

1 Corinthians 10 governs the values of mature Christians by revealing that past spiritual experiences do not guarantee future spiritual successes. This is clear in the example of Israel, recounted in verses 1-12; though Israel experienced many spiritual

⁴⁷ Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 21.

⁴⁸ Garland, *First Corinthians*, 445.

⁴⁹ I believe Paul’s point here is that if he does not continue to exercise self-control and self-restraint in his gospel ministry, he will ultimately be revealed to be a hypocrite, thus sabotaging his gospel work.

victories and blessings, they turned to idolatry at the slightest provocation. Their idolatry, which is Paul's central concern in 1 Corinthians 8-10, manifested itself through the worship of idols and corresponding sinful lifestyle. This return to idolatry was a danger to Israel of old and is a continuing danger to New Testament Christians.

Idolatry Is Demonically Motivated (vv. 20-26)

These ideas are directly connected to Paul's readers in verses 11-22. If ancient Israel, who had experienced God's presence and mighty works, still fell into idolatry, New Testament Christians are susceptible to this as well. Therefore, we ought not live carelessly because our lifestyle decisions affect our faith. Christians ought to live carefully, avoiding behaviors which will influence either ourselves or weak Christians to return to idolatry; Paul puts this into the clearest command in verse 14, "Flee idolatry." But upon closer inspection, his teachings in verses 15-22 provide a curious foil to his teachings in chapter 8.

In chapter 8, Paul's permissions to eat food offered to idols are clearly stated. He argues that idols are nothing, and food is not affected because it sat before an idol in worship (8:4). Paul is concerned only that strong Christians who eat such food may negatively impact the faith of weak Christians (8:9). But in 10:20-21, Paul says that, because idols are demonically empowered, and demons are real, there is a very real sense of demonism at play in idol worship. Therefore, he implies that we should not eat food offered to idols, so there is a superficial tension with his teachings in chapters 8 and 10.

These viewpoints may be harmonized by understanding that chapters 8 and 10 represent two distinct social and spiritual contexts for eating idol food. In one set of contexts, eating idol food is permissible. In the other context, eating idol food is not permissible. The trouble lies not with the food itself but with the context in which it is eaten. In the first context, it is permissible to eat idol food in a setting that does not involve idolatrous ritual. This is mentioned in 8:10, as per our discussion above. There

were various events that took place in the pagan temple which involved eating idol food, but the events themselves were primarily secular in nature and did not involve idolatrous ritual. Paul returns to the concept of permissible secular contexts in chapter 10 by discussing the possibility of eating idol food in the marketplace or a neighbor's house (10:25-28).

However, in 10:14-21, Paul refers to a context where eating idol food is absolutely not permissible; this is a setting of idolatrous ritual where idols are being worshiped.⁵⁰ The eating of idol food in idolatrous worship is compared to eating at the Lord's table in the fellowship of saints; it is clear that worship celebrations are in view in this context.⁵¹ Furthermore, the introduction to chapter 10 demonstrates this principle of conscious idolatrous ritual, as Paul discusses the failure of Israel, as they turned from God to worship idols. When people are worshiping idols, there is a demonic presence of some sort. But when a Christian eats idol food in a non-ritualistic context, there is no such continuing presence or influence. So, the principles of chapters 8 and 10 harmonize very well when we understand that, as Paul illustrates in chapter 10, a distinction of setting and mentality lead to a distinction in ethical acceptability. This is true wherever the food is eaten—in the market, in the temple, in your own home, or in a neighbor's home.

In verse 23, Paul shows how his illustrative material at the beginning of chapter 9 directly relates to his primary teaching about gospel work. Christians do have legitimate liberties, such as eating idol food, getting married, being paid for ministerial

⁵⁰ This is a very significant distinction. Scholars who distinguish settings are Blomberg (*First Corinthians*, 279), Oropeza (*First Corinthians*, 282), Taylor (*First Corinthians*, 436), Fee (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 515, 521), and Garland (*First Corinthians*, 481). Those who do not clearly distinguish settings include Schreiner (*1 Corinthians*, 212) and Ciampa (*The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 978-79).

⁵¹ Blomberg, *First Corinthians*, 291.

work, and so on, but ought not exercise such liberty in a manner which may influence a weak Christian to return to idolatry. Paul repeats almost verbatim the maxim which he quoted in 6:12. The focus of the Christian is not hedonism; instead, we are to focus on honoring Christ and edifying others. As Charles Barrett says pointedly, “It is not a Christian duty to seek out things that a man may be permitted to do; it is a Christian duty to build up the church.”⁵² David Garland agrees. “Carried to an extreme, this maxim would appear to legalize every behavior and every object and could explain the problems besetting the congregation...many things, harmless in themselves in the abstract, do harm to others in the concrete.”⁵³ So the phrase “all things” (v. 23) cannot refer to things explicitly stated as unlawful; we need only look at the Ten Commandments as an example, and Jesus’ affirmation of them, to understand that there are many things which are indeed unlawful for the Christian.

This phrase, then, may be more clearly translated in the fashion that Paul explains it. “All things that are lawful are not necessarily helpful.”⁵⁴ Such a translation puts the emphasis of the saying precisely where Paul puts it. Many behaviors are explicitly forbidden by the Scriptures, and, therefore, may not be properly thought of as lawful. Even many things that are not specifically forbidden may not be helpful, wise, nor even moral. To demand the letter of the law in every instance is to devolve into legalism by insisting that the law spell out every specific behavior in every specific instance of life at all times and places. However, Paul explains that the law does not function in this fashion.⁵⁵

⁵² Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 239.

⁵³ Garland, *First Corinthians*, 226.

⁵⁴ Baker, *1 Corinthians*, 364.

⁵⁵ This is a profound point, because Paul is both arguing for the end of the law, but also showing the original intent of the law.

In verse 25, Paul gives us insight into the historical practices of the Corinthians—meat that was being sold in the meat market had previously been offered to idols, or this wouldn't even be a question. Paul says if you are wandering through the market, and you see a piece of meat that you want to eat, feel free to eat it. There is no need to ask a question about it nor to seek out problems nor create problems. The Christian has enough problems already, so it is unnecessary to create artificial problems by asking the question.

But, when Paul says in verse 25, “Do not ask any questions for the sake of conscience,” whose conscience did he mean? Scholars are fairly unanimous that Paul has the conscience of all Christians in view; but Paul has already dealt with the conscience of strong Christians and affirmed that they are not troubled by these issues.⁵⁶ Paul presumes that, for the mature Christian, eating meat offered to idols is no hindrance to conscience at all. Therefore, in conjunction with his concluding principle at the end of chapter 8, I propose that Paul is primarily referring to the conscience of a weaker Christian, who observes such liberty in action.

There is an aspect of this principle that directly relates to issues of conservative evangelical culture in our day. Gordon Fee points out that Paul's permissions here to eat idol food fly directly in the face of historical, conservative Jewish traditions and teachings. On the basis of their understanding of the Old Testament texts and Mosaic Law, the Jewish rabbis had constructed arguments that prohibited eating meat offered to idols, as well as sitting at meals with idolaters, which Paul will mention shortly.⁵⁷ But these “sacred cows” and traditions were ultimately the construct of men and not the will of God. Fee says, “Apart from Paul's radical statements on circumcision (i.e., that it is

⁵⁶ Garland, *First Corinthians*, 490.

⁵⁷ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 532.

unnecessary), it is hard to imagine anything more un-Jewish in the apostle than this.”⁵⁸ Barrett agrees. “Paul makes a clean break with Judaism, where conscience demanded of the devout Jew the most searching inquiry before he might eat.”⁵⁹

These are profound truths for the Christian; we are reminded that morality and ethics are defined by God’s character and divine revelation, as opposed to the logical arguments, religious traditions, or cultural norms of men. Furthermore, in Paul’s hypothetical situation, the Christian is brought into direct conflict with Old Testament teachings. Paul demonstrates that Christians do not have biblical permission to wantonly use the Old Testament Law to support any issue of their own choosing. Much misunderstanding and even spiritual abuse has been engendered through a thoughtless hermeneutic of the Old Testament, and Paul is disavowing such a hermeneutic right here. So he explains why the mature Christian may freely eat of any meat sold in the market. The mature Christian understands that all meat is the gift of God; it belongs to God and comes from God, so it is God’s good gift to us.

Social Relationships Are Gospel Opportunities (vv. 27-30)

Paul introduces another scenario in verse 27: being invited to dinner with friends who are not Christians. This is a more complex situation than purchasing food in the marketplace. The marketplace is impersonal and somewhat anonymous, but a meal with a neighboring family is very personal. This is an ongoing relationship of spiritual influence, and this spiritual influence will be directly affected by our dietary choices.

Paul presumes that, in the normal course of life, Christians have liberty to eat with their heathen friends. These heathen friends may be relatives, coworkers, or

⁵⁸ Fee, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 532.

⁵⁹ Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 240.

neighbors: the sort of relationships that are the natural consequence of being socially connected. Furthermore, it is good to have these sorts of friendly relationships in society, as Paul goes on to explain, because these relationships have profound gospel implications. Such relationships may lead to uncomfortable conversations, but these are opportunities for gospel witness. Paul says that if a Christian is invited to dinner with his neighbor, he should eat with grace and gratitude, asking no unnecessary questions.

But Paul poses a further conundrum in verse 28: what if your neighbor makes a deliberate statement because they know you are a Christian and are giving you an ethical test? The statement may sound like this: “Before you begin eating, I want you to know that this food was previously offered to an idol.” Paul has already explained that eating it will not affect the faith of the strong Christian, but eating it in the presence of an idolatrous friend may very well have a negative spiritual influence in their mind. Paul says we should never do this. For the Christian, the salvation of lost people is one of our highest and noblest goals; so, with the knowledge that this is spiritually-desecrated food, Paul says, graciously decline and request something else to eat.

As we search out Paul’s intended meaning in verse 28, we must also understand what Paul does not mean. Gordon Fee explains.

The one who has pointed out the sacrificial origins of this meat to a believer has done so out of a sense of moral obligation to them, believing that Christians, like Jews, would not eat such food. So as not to offend that person, nor their moral expectations of a follower of Christ, and precisely because it is not a matter of a believer’s moral consciousness, one should forbear under these circumstances.⁶⁰

This clarifies very well what is so often the abuse of these texts regarding Christian liberty: that we should not behave in certain ways because we are worried of offending our brothers and sisters in Christ who may be more conservative in certain areas. While love and grace are the hallmarks of mature Christianity, this is not at all

⁶⁰ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 535.

what Paul has in mind.⁶¹ His concern is that the strong Christian avoid negatively influencing an idol-worshiper or a new and immature Christian.

At the end of verse 29, Paul asks another hypothetical question: “Why is my liberty judged by another man’s conscience?” This is a difficult phrase to translate. Paul seems to be saying that we should have freedom to exercise liberty, unrestricted from the conscience of another; but we know this cannot be the case because Paul has stated numerous times that our liberty is, indeed, restricted by the consciences of others. There are a couple of possibilities here, which I reject. A. T. Robertson interpolates a weaker Christian here at the banquet, but the context clearly indicates a meal with unbelievers, so it is a stretch to add weaker Christians.⁶² Ciampa describes these as ironic and rhetorical devices, but this would compel us to read the text in the reverse of the plain sense.⁶³ Gordon Fee proposes that the prayer of thanksgiving in verse 30 absolves us from wrongdoing because we acknowledge that this food is God’s gift, but the direct connection to conscience is difficult to make out.⁶⁴ In my view, the conundrum may be best clarified by explaining the phrase this way: “Do not behave in such a way as to allow people to judge you, due to your liberty. You know you have liberty, but you do not need to flaunt it. In fact, you may surrender your liberty for the benefit of others and be just fine.” Thiselton chronicles a number of interpretive options and reaches the same conclusion as my own.⁶⁵

Paul presses on to the conclusion of his lengthy conversation in verses 29-30.

⁶¹ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 269.

⁶² A.T. Robertson, “*Robertson’s Word Pictures*,” note on 1 Corinthians 10:29, accessed via E-sword.

⁶³ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 286.

⁶⁴ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 537.

⁶⁵ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 788-93.

Someone has heard of the liberty of the stronger brother and is speaking evil of him for it. Paul intimates that the liberty of the stronger brother has been a topic of gossip within the church, and now he is receiving criticism for his liberty.⁶⁶ For sincere and committed followers of Jesus Christ, this sort of backbiting in the church ought not happen.

The Christian Must Do All to the Glory of God (v. 31)

While there are many questions in verses 29-30, verse 31 is one of the clearest declarations of Christian purpose in all of the Bible. Playing off the themes of eating and drinking, which he has been emphasizing for three chapters now, Paul says that even such mundane daily activities must be carefully considered to bring greatest glory to God. Furthermore, Paul broadens this principle to cover other areas of life. Eating and drinking form the most basic activities of life. But this principle must be applied to every area of life. The heartbeat of the Christian is to glorify God in every fashion possible.

When Paul says “give no offense,” he cannot mean “do not offend anyone at any time for any reason” because this is impossible. Rather, Paul is once again referring to the offense of the conscience as it relates to the gospel,⁶⁷ nor is this hypocrisy in any sense. A mature Christian has every right to exercise and defend their liberty, yet still choose not to exercise it, for the sake of the gospel. Legitimate liberties need not be pushed upon others; here, humility and love must win the day.

So when the mature Christian is with Jews who do not know Christ or are new to the Christian faith, the mature Christian behaves in such a way so as not to compel the Jew to forsake faith in Christ and return to Old Testament Judaism (v. 32). When the mature Christian is with Greeks who do not know Christ or are new to the Christian faith,

⁶⁶ Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 244.

⁶⁷ Taylor, *First Corinthians*, 445.

the mature Christian carefully considers his behavior, so as not to influence the Greek to return to idolatry. This humble consideration of personal liberty manifests itself most profoundly within the church, because the church is God's incubator for new spiritual life. By design, Jews and Gentiles of all stages of spiritual maturity are found within the church, and those who are strong ought to accommodate the sensitivities of the weak, rather than pleasing themselves.

Paul concludes this lengthy study on Christian liberty by offering himself as an example (11:1). He has done everything possible to bring people to Jesus, causing no unnecessary offense, sacrificing his own liberty and comfort, and, in all things, seeking the glory of God. Paul's behavior closely mimicked Christ's behavior; thus, we are called to follow Christ and Paul as appropriate templates of godly, selfless behavior.

Conclusion

This teaching resonates deeply in the heart of the mature and serious Christian. Our faith is essentially a missionary faith, and we are always sensitive to the gospel needs of the people that God has brought into our lives. Our relationships represent gospel opportunities and have gospel consequences, and, either rightly or wrongly, shape a person's understanding of Jesus Christ and the salvation He offers. The mature Christian is well able to enjoy life freely, and God has given us richly all things to enjoy. But if the heart of the gospel is true love for Christ and for our fellow man, then the mature Christian is willing to sacrifice personal liberties for the wellbeing of those who are not Christians. Such loving, selfless sacrifice is a powerful tool to bring men and women to Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL
ISSUES RELATED TO THE PROJECT

Introduction

The very heart of Christian liberty is the gospel of Jesus Christ and effective gospel outreach, as Paul revealed in his teaching in 1 Corinthians 8-10. However, there are some basic considerations at play in the application of the principles of Christian liberty to gospel outreach. These basic considerations were “presupposed” by Paul as he addressed the Corinthians. He stated this explicitly in 1 Corinthians 8:1 when he said, “all of us possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.” These basic considerations or knowledge, which Paul was presuming in his teaching, were that the Corinthian Christians possessed a high degree of familiarity and intimacy with the idolatrous culture of Corinth, and many Christians in the Corinthian church had actually come out of that very background. So, as the Corinthian Christians were learning how to apply the principles of Christian liberty to effective gospel outreach in their social context, they had the significant advantage of familiarity and intimacy with idolaters in their social context.

In our social context of Novi, Michigan, there is a demographic that reflects many aspects of Corinthian idolatry, and this demographic is the local Indian Hindu population. However, the Christians in our social context lack the knowledge of and intimacy with Indian Hindus that Corinthian Christians demonstrated in their interactions with their idolatrous neighbors. Perhaps we could say that Paul’s teaching on Christian liberty was “third base” in the gospel process. If so, what then would comprise “first

base” and “second base,” which must be reached prior to the “third base” of appropriate demonstrations of Christian liberty?

In order for Christians in our social context to be able to demonstrate the gospel implications of Christian liberty to our Hindu neighbors, there must be a level of familiarity with the basic tenets of Hinduism, along with a significant amount of personal and spiritual interaction with Hindus, so that they may sensitively implement these gospel principles. In short, the greatest needs in our context are time, appropriate teaching, and a willingness to develop the meaningful relationships necessary to effectively share the gospel with local Hindus. Only after gospel relationships have been thoroughly established with Hindus may the principles of Christian liberty be demonstrated, as will be shown in this chapter.

This chapter is intended to provide a summary of Hindu history and thought for the benefit of Christian evangelists in our social context who desire to evangelize their Hindu neighbors. This information will help Christian evangelists grow in their understanding of the spiritual and cultural background of Indian Hindus, gain some knowledge of how to begin gospel conversations, learn how to avoid derailing those conversations as they progress, and, ultimately, avoid unnecessary offenses to Hindus who are seeking Jesus or may have recently accepted Jesus Christ as Savior. Paul did not address the first two steps of this process in his teaching on 1 Corinthians 8-10; he presumed that they had already been completed in the Corinthian context. However, these steps are necessary in order to attain the goal of the appropriate expressions of Christian liberty as it relates to gospel outreach in our contemporary context.

A vast amount of scholarly literature has been written on Hinduism, detailing every facet of Hindu development and teaching. Because the literature is truly overwhelming, a survey of this sort is indebted to the many smaller volumes that have been written to introduce Hinduism to a Western audience. These resources, written from

a Hindu perspective, will function as the primary source for the review of Hinduism presented in this chapter.

History of Hinduism

An understanding of Hindu history is important for the Christian evangelist because the history of Hinduism and India is deeply intertwined; this intertwining creates a powerful loyalty within the Indian Hindu towards his Hindu heritage, even if the full facts and implications of his heritage are not explicitly known nor understood. A study of this history reveals why Hinduism is described by many Hindus as a “philosophy of life” rather than a “religion;” although, for the Christian, the religious underpinnings and overtones within Hinduism are unavoidable. However, Hinduism is as much cultural to the ethnic Indian as it is religious; it is hard to say with certainty where Indian culture ends and Hindu religion begins, and this presents many tensions for the evangelism of Hindus.

Hinduism derives its name from the Indus River and comes from the same root word as the name *India*; these words are etymologically similar and demonstrate the intertwining of religion and society in Indian culture from its earliest years.¹ The early history of Hinduism is uncertain and unreliable. “Scholars cannot agree about the period in which certain significant events in Hindu history took place—especially when the focus is on events occurring more than several thousand years ago. For example, there is still no agreement on the period in which the most sacred scriptures of Hindus, the Vedas, were compiled.”² Some scholars (generally of Indian origin) date the origins of Hinduism to be anywhere from 25,000 to 6000 BC, while other scholars (generally Western)

¹ Domenic Marbaniang, *History of Hinduism: Pre-Vedic and Vedic Age*. (Domenic Marbaniang E-book, SCRIBD, 2015): 5.

² Amrutur V. Srinivasan, *Hinduism for Dummies*. (Hoboken, NJ: Wily Publishing, 2011): 51.

typically put the date between 4500 and 1200 BC.³ However accurate these dates may be, they serve to demonstrate that Indian history and Hindu history are both ancient, and this creates a powerful, cultural, and historical pull on Indian Hindus in our own day.

The Vedas are considered to be the most sacred of Hindu Scriptures, and the earliest written transcriptions of the Vedas function as the clearest starting point for Hindu history.⁴ With this in mind, Indologists name a start date of 1500 BC as the onset of “true beginning of history in ancient India.”⁵ There are other Hindu Scriptures to consider, as well. For example, the Hindu epics Ramayana and Mahabharata were written down in the millennium from 500 BC to AD 500. These epics had existed in various oral forms for many centuries earlier but were formally written down around the time of Christ. The Upanishads (philosophical treatises in dialogue form) were written down around this time as well.⁶

A further influential development in the history of Hinduism was the birth of Siddhartha Gautama in 556 BC in Nepal.⁷ Siddhartha Guatama would later come to be known by his more famous title, the Buddha. Around the age of thirty-five, Gautama began to develop a new branch of Hinduism, which would ultimately become unique and independent of Hinduism, to the degree of becoming the dominant religion of the Far East: Buddhism. Buddhism faded into the background in India⁸ but continued to grow in prominence in Nepal and China.

³ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 62.

⁴ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 64.

⁵ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 67.

⁶ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 75.

⁷ Ramachandran, *A History of Hinduism*, 76.

⁸ Ramachandran, *A History of Hinduism*, 79.

While Buddhism is an outgrowth of Hinduism, and there are parallels between the two religions, there are also significant distinctions between them. A comparison of these two religious systems is also illuminating for the Christian evangelist. For example, the creator god Brahman is central to Hinduism, while Buddhism denies the existence of a creator.⁹ Furthermore, Buddhism does not recognize the individual soul.¹⁰ Ramachandran makes the assessment that “[religions that] do not recognize any cognizable gods are left...without a foundation.”¹¹

Evangelical Christians would agree with this, as two fundamental tenets of our faith are that “God is, and God has spoken.”¹² In fact, this becomes an entry point for gospel conversations; Hindus and Christians share a common faith in a creative god, but the identity and nature of the Christian God is vastly different than the Hindu conception of God. Christians may profitably discuss the person and nature of the Christian God with their Hindu friends by pointing out His eternality, monotheistic nature, personal attributes, and creative work. Opening the conversation with a discussion about the nature of God will inevitably lead to further discussions about Jesus Christ; this central issue will be considered further below.

Another historically significant development of Hinduism was the building of temples. “During the ninth to twelfth centuries AD, the great temples of South India were built and they have served as the foundation of the growth of Puranic Hinduism.”¹³ Many of the temples built in this time period were quite large and ornate and are still used for

⁹ Ramachandran, *A History of Hinduism*, 87.

¹⁰ Ramachandran, *A History of Hinduism*, 87.

¹¹ Ramachandran, *A History of Hinduism*, 87.

¹² Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity, Vol. 1*. (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008): 9-12.

¹³ Ramachandran, *A History of Hinduism*, 130.

Hindu worship today.¹⁴ They are a point of national pride in India, and American Indian Hindus feel strongly connected to them as well. The history of temple-building is so impactful that Ramachandran says, “The history of Hindu temples is indeed the history of Hinduism from around the fifth century AD onwards.”¹⁵ The temple feature of Hinduism has also become increasingly prominent in the United States in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and has greatly influenced the nature of Hinduism in the United States for reasons that will be discussed below.

While Hindu temple-building has served to coalesce the Hindu community in a variety of ways, it has also served to open the door to Christian evangelism. The socioreligious nature of the Hindu temple causes Hindus to be open to socioreligious gatherings at local churches as well. For many Hindus, these sorts of church events may be a first step toward an ongoing gospel conversation and quite likely the very first time that they would enter a church for any reason.

In more recent times, one of the greatest influences on contemporary Hinduism was the expansion of the British Empire. British expansion brought with it cultural, economic, and religious influence.¹⁶ This influence was primarily felt during the nineteenth century, as Hindu leaders sought to end the caste system and improve the status of women.¹⁷ Ironically, India was a very fragmented state prior to the influence of the English; it was only through British influence that the various tribes of India were brought into meaningful contact with one another.¹⁸ The confluence of British Christianity in India causes many Indians to view Christianity as a western religion, to be

¹⁴ Ramachandran, *A History of Hinduism*, 151.

¹⁵ Ramachandran, *A History of Hinduism*, 163.

¹⁶ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 76.

¹⁷ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 78.

¹⁸ Marbaniang, *History of Hinduism*, 9.

accepted or rejected with western culture as they see fit.

This brief survey serves to demonstrate that the history of Hinduism is ancient, varied, and organically intertwined with the Indian psyche through the pull of ancient norms and loyalties. This intertwining makes Christian evangelistic efforts difficult from the outset because, to the Indian Hindu, such efforts may feel like an attack on Indian culture itself. Christian evangelists must be extremely sensitive to these tensions and focus the gospel conversation carefully and appropriately.

Overview of Hinduism

As sincere Christians seek to evangelize their Indian Hindu community, they must have some insight into the philosophy and practices of Indian Hindus. Unless a Christian has been raised in a Hindu environment, encountering Hindu thought can be confusing or even off-putting. While many Hindus may not be “devout,” they still possess a baseline of worldview and practice with which Christian evangelists must become familiar. This familiarity is a demonstration of patient love on the part of the Christian toward the Hindu, as they seek to understand the Hindu mindset and win the Hindu to Christ. As Christians become increasingly familiar with the philosophy and practices of their Hindu friends, they may carefully discuss the gospel of Jesus Christ without causing undue offense. This familiarity functions as the beginning stages of gospel witness to Hindus; the implementation of the principles of Christian liberty will come a bit later in the process, as the Hindu is seeking Christ prior to his salvation or has left Hinduism in favor of Christ.

Primarily because India has a large ethnic population, Hinduism is vast. There are over one billion Hindus in the world, and 1.5 to 2.5 million Hindus live in the United

States.¹⁹ Bharti claims that more than 80 percent of Indians are Hindus.²⁰ This is true even though Hinduism is not naturally an evangelizing sort of religion; within Hinduism there are many paths to the gods, and each person is invited to take his own journey of truth.²¹ In short, Hindus describe Hinduism as “A combination of philosophical, cultural, and religious practices.”²² While Hindus are not naturally open to the gospel of Jesus Christ, the vastness of Hinduism represents the vast possibilities of gospel grace and gospel fruit among this people group.

The Writings of Hinduism

At the heart of Hindu teaching are the sacred scriptures and ancient stories.²³ Ancient Hindus received their religion through the revelation of the Vedas. There are four Vedas in total: the *Rig Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, *Sama Veda*, and *Atharva Veda*. According to Srinivasan, a true test of a Hindu is his acceptance of the authority of the Vedas,²⁴ although the average Hindu may be quite unfamiliar with them. Hindus believe that the Vedas are without beginning and without end, and they affirm that the Vedas are more than mere books. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, the Vedas are “the accumulated treasure of spiritual laws discovered by different persons at different times.”²⁵

There are other sacred writings in addition to the Vedas. For example, Srinivasan explains, “The Hindu epic called the Mahabharata is the longest poem in the

¹⁹ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 28.

²⁰ Pandit Nityanand Bharti, *Learn Everything About Hinduism: Beginner’s Guide to Know the Religion*. (Smashwords E-book, SCRIBD, 2015): 17.

²¹ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 28.

²² Bharti, *Learn Everything About Hinduism*, 17.

²³ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 30.

²⁴ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 92.

²⁵ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 91.

world, with more than 100,000 couplets; it is 15 times the length of the Bible and 8 times the length of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combined...it tells the story of a bloody war that took place in a location called Kurukshetra in India's northern plains."²⁶ Other Hindu writings were noted above.

As we consider the vast scope of the Hindu scriptures, we begin to understand one major reason why Hinduism is difficult to grasp, even for Hindus: the writings are immense, and there is simply too much information to assimilate into a cohesive whole. For the average Hindu who may struggle simply to make a living, there may be no consideration of their sacred writings at all. However, it is important for Christians to have a basic understanding of the scope of the Hindu Scriptures because the Hindu conception of their scriptures does lend to an entry point for Christian evangelism. Christians may explain the historical nature of the Bible, pointing out the fact that it is an ancient text with many ancient and reliable manuscripts. Furthermore, Christian Scriptures are cohesive in their teaching. The role of prophecies, especially as they relate to Christ and are fulfilled in Christ, may be a fascinating point of consideration for a Hindu.

Conversely, Christians must avoid the trap of seeking to merely "disprove" the Vedas and "prove" the Bible; such an approach leads to arrogant intellectualism, but it does not lend to winsome evangelism. In fact, an attitude of intellectual superiority is the very opposite of Paul's teaching on Christian liberty. As he said in 1 Corinthians 8:1, "All of us possess knowledge. This knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." Trumpeting the superiority of the Bible and our knowledge of the one true God may be true statements of fact, but they are also a revelation of a lack of grace. The Bible is the window into the heart and mind of God and the person of Jesus Christ, and, ultimately,

²⁶ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 90.

the Christian evangelist can do no better than to simply open the Scriptures and point to Jesus.

Basic Philosophy of Hinduism

The belief system of Hinduism can be a mystery to Christian minds. This ignorance may lead to real hesitations in opening a gospel conversation, so it is beneficial for the Christian evangelist to possess a basic understanding of Hindu teaching. Hindu teaching has been summarized by Srinivasan in the following fashion.

Unlike other organized religions, Hinduism does not have a single systematic, Sunday-school type of approach to teach its value system. Nor is there a simple set of rules like the Ten Commandments. Local, regional, caste, and community-driven practices influence the interpretation and practice of beliefs throughout the Hindu world. Yet a common thread among all these variations may be found in Hindus' belief in a Supreme Being and a feel for certain basic concepts such as truth, dharma, and karma irrespective of an individual's caste, knowledge base, and educational background. Of course, belief in the authority of the Vedas...serves, to a large extent, as the very definition of a Hindu, even though how the Vedas are interpreted may vary greatly.²⁷

Srinivasan's summary functions as our starting point for the exploration of the basic teachings of Hinduism. However, other Hindu scholars reject such a summary of Hinduism. Samarpan says, "The lack of defining boundaries in it makes it difficult to be specific about what Hinduism is, or who is a Hindu. Even a common Hindu is usually not sure what they must do to be a good Hindu."²⁸ If it is difficult for Hindus to define Hinduism, it is far more difficult for Christians to interact with Hinduism. Because an amorphous entity is difficult to engage with specificity, Christians are wise to ask questions of individual Hindus to determine their specific viewpoint, rather than making assumptions and generalities.

Hinduism possesses a broad set of beliefs. In its early history, Hinduism held to the

²⁷ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 86-87.

²⁸ Samarpan. *Living Hinduism: Scriptures, Philosophy, Practices*. (New Delhi, India: Niyogi Books, 2017): 234.

belief of “One Supreme Being;” over the centuries, it developed its present teachings of many deities, over many millions of deities by some counts.²⁹ Srinivasan describes the Hindu concept of polytheism and pantheism. “Hinduism has evolved...from worshipping nature to worshipping deities in temples, distinguishing the Supreme Soul from an individual soul in one approach and maintaining no such distinction in another—all in parallel, all inclusive, all still flourishing, letting go of nothing. Even atheism is accepted.”³⁰ A little later, he expands on Hindu polytheistic and pantheistic dogma.

Early Hindu thought had a clear focus on the One Supreme Being. Yet Hinduism ended up embracing a large number of gods and goddesses. This one-size-doesn't-fit-all realization provided an extraordinary variety of choice for individuals to worship. The One without a second doctrine, however, which holds that God and the universe are one and the same, remains fundamental and is still preserved.³¹

Another difficulty of defining Hinduism is due to the complex evolution through which Hinduism has gone. In early Hindu development, the polytheistic system of Hinduism differed from other polytheistic systems in that it “elevated the Brahmin and the hierarchy of the caste-system...Later Hinduism, of course, assimilated a number of philosophical interpretations allowing a very inclusivist pluralism that was able to make Hinduism look like anything other than the explicit foreign religions.”³² Average Hindus may hold to either an earlier or later form of Hinduism without being aware of the evolution of Hinduism or why there are differences in early or late Hinduism. For the Christian evangelist, asking patient and open-minded personal questions is a great tool at stimulating spiritual conversations, instead of than blunt affirmations about Hinduism that may or may not apply to the individual in question.

²⁹ Leigh Merryman. “The Basics of Hinduism.” Accessed March 29, 2022. <https://www.imb.org/2018/08/10/the-basics-of-hinduism/>.

³⁰ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 29.

³¹ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 45-46.

³² Marbaniang, *History of Hinduism*, 7.

Beyond its conception of divinity, early Hinduism also developed a central set of theological maxims: (1) belief in the sacredness of the Vedas, (2) belief in the sacredness of the caste hierarchy, (3) belief in the practice or devotion advanced by the Upanishads or Bhagavad Gita, and (4) belief in naturalistic theology (the teaching that God and nature do not differ in substance).³³ While these doctrines are central, they are held somewhat loosely; Hinduism is often illustrated by the proverb that “Truth is like the many rivers that run to the ocean, and are embraced and transformed into something much bigger and more meaningful. One way of thinking is just one river of truth; the ocean is everything.”³⁴

Such a mentality is clearly contradictory to the Christian mindset. In Christian teaching, the Bible is the Word of God and is truth (John 17:17). This objective, God-sourced truth points to Jesus Christ, who Himself is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6). Such a view of truth provides sure footing for the faith of the Christian, while the Hindu conception of truth seems to lead to neverending questions and hopelessness. Consequently, a fair question to ask the Hindu is, “How certain are you of your eternal salvation?”

Another core Hindu teaching is the concept of Brahma, as explained by Srinivasan:

Brahman is all-inclusive, encompassing everything in the universe. It has no form. Brahman, the pure and formless One, limitless and all-pervading, is everywhere. It is the divine essence and substratum of the universe containing being and nonbeing. It is the timeless entity from which all else issues and into which all else returns. Brahman is the only thing real in the universe.³⁵

³³ Marbaniang, *History of Hinduism*, 8.

³⁴ Samarpan, *Living Hinduism*, 225.

³⁵ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 90-91.

Another central Hindu tenet is the belief that the eternal soul is uncreated and undestroyed; it simply exists.³⁶ This is fascinating because such a conception of the “soul” parallels certain features of the Christian God. In fact, this characteristic of uncreated eternity is actually one feature that makes the Christian God unique and is central to his very “Godness.”

Within Hindu philosophy, there is an intimate connection “between the *jivatman*, the individual soul, and the *Paramatman*, the Supreme Soul.”³⁷ Furthermore, Hinduism advocates for the inevitability of death; this is a principle that is universal to humanity. But the concept of death has real implications for the Hindu belief in reincarnation. “Upon death of the body, the soul needs a residence in another body being born in order to experience the results of karma carried out in the previous body—unless, that is, it is ready for the final step of being absorbed in the Supreme Self.”³⁸ The ultimate goal for the Hindu is for the soul to be released from the death-rebirth cycle, so that it may merge with the Supreme Soul.³⁹

Such a belief in the nature of the soul is partly the reason why many Hindus, especially of the Brahmin caste, are vegan and will not eat meat. Their view of animals and violence toward animals in the form of eating them is closely related to their teaching on reincarnation. Any animal they eat could be the reincarnation of a former human, even a relative.⁴⁰ This is perhaps the most direct correlation to Christian liberty that we have discovered so far in this study and a point worthy of real consideration by the Christian evangelist. If a Christian is building a gospel relationship with a Hindu neighbor, and that

³⁶ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 96.

³⁷ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 97.

³⁸ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 98.

³⁹ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 98.

⁴⁰ Mahavidya. “Vegetarianism in Hinduism.” Accessed March 24, 2023. <http://www.mahavidya.ca/2010/08/19/vegetarianism-in-hinduism/>.

Hindu neighbor might be led away from Christ because the Christian thoughtlessly eats meat in his presence, then the Christian ought to restrain his liberty by eating only fruits and vegetables in the presence of his Hindu neighbor. While this may feel like a sacrifice, it truly is the demonstration of Christ's love by exercising restraint in the areas of legitimate liberties.⁴¹

Perhaps one of the most important Hindu concepts to understand is its perception of truth. While the concept of truth is at the intersection of philosophy and religion, Hindus have traditionally made no sharp distinctions among truth, religion, and reality. They see these three concepts as deeply related and overlapping.⁴² As Srinivasan explains, "Truth is a multilayered concept. It is more than just being 'right' or factual. It is even more than being ethical and moral. In fact, Truth is more than all those attributes combined. In Hinduism, Truth comprehends the natural laws of the universe. Truth is absolute and eternal. For Hindus, Truth is, in a word, God."⁴³

Such an explanation comes close to the Christian idea of truth in the sense that truth is more than self-existent, empirical fact. But it is possible that scholars such as Srinivasan are deliberately drawing a philosophical connection to Christianity that isn't actually as similar as it seems. A few lines later, he says, "Because Truth isn't a particular path or answer but the very essence of the universe, it is, therefore, the only real thing. It is Reality."⁴⁴ A little further, he says again, "Hindus are brought up to believe in God—in whatever form (Fire, Sun, Krishna, Rama, Linga) the individual's family and community

⁴¹ This point was pressed home to me during a personal conversation I had with one of my violin students, who is a Hindu from the Brahman caste. She and her family are very devout Hindus; they frequently travel to India to visit family and worship in the temples, they study Sanskrit so as to be able to read religious texts in the ancient languages, and they are vegan for precisely the reasons I described. To her, eating meat is detestable because you may be eating a family friend or loved one who has been reincarnated.

⁴² Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 87.

⁴³ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 88-89.

⁴⁴ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 89.

perceive God to be.”⁴⁵ In this way, he equates God with reality. However, in the Christian view, God is inextricably linked to reality but stands both in and out of it as a distinct Being. God is truth, and God is the source and end of truth. Truth comes from God, but truth is not God.

These sorts of discussions provide a fertile field for gospel interaction between Christian evangelists and Hindus if a relationship of trust has been established, and the spirit of the Christian is one of humility and grace, while holding fast to a biblical worldview. God and His word are our truth, and there is an exclusivity to this. Such biblical statements may prove offensive to Hindus; but that is the offense of the gospel, and that is why the spirit of Christian liberty and gospel grace must pervade the mentality of the Christian. Christian statements of truth can and must be made, but, without a familiarity with Hinduism and the spirit of compassion described throughout this chapter, truth statements of this sort will only prove to be offensive rather than winsome.

The Path of the Hindu

According to Hindu scholars, the ideal of a Hindu is to make his way toward spiritual freedom through any of the spiritual paths he prefers to take.⁴⁶ While there are prevailing ethical norms within Hinduism (as will be discussed below), there is also a strong sense of autonomy and personal freedom regarding belief structure and life practice. The points to follow are spiritual and lifestyle points that could be profitably discussed between a Christian evangelist and his Hindu friend, provided that some degree of relationship of familiarity and trust has been established. The spiritual paths of Hinduism are also called yogas and are required to attain union with the Supreme

⁴⁵ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 89.

⁴⁶ Samarpan, *Living Hinduism*, 235.

Being.⁴⁷ Bharti states that there are “four options” among the yogas, and it is up to the individual to choose his preferred path. The Four Yogas of choice are Jnana Yoga (Knowledge), Bhakti Yoga (Love), Karma Yoga (Work), and Raja Yoga (Meditation).⁴⁸

Along with the Four Yogas, there are four personal aims to be realized during the course of a lifetime. “The first of these is *dharma*. The other three are *artha* (wealth, prosperity, reputation, fame), *kama* (sensory and aesthetic fulfillment), and *moksha* (liberation and salvation). Hindus are obligated to practice *artha* and *kama* with *dharma* as the foundation in order to attain salvation and release from cycles of birth.”⁴⁹

Dharma is very significant. Briefly explained, dharma is the principle that each person must perform his or her duty,⁵⁰ and the concept of “duty” seems to be a foundation stone for many Hindus. Even Hindus who may not be familiar with their own yoga or their own personal aim will still feel a strong sense of dharma, or duty.⁵¹ Bharti provides a helpful synopsis of dharma. Quoting the ancient Hindu sage Manu, Bharti explains that there are ten rules of dharma: forgiveness, honesty, control of senses, truthfulness, sanctity, piety, reason, knowledge, absence of anger, and patience.⁵²

Within Hinduism, there are six main temptations to avoid: lust or

⁴⁷ Bharti, *Learn Everything About Hinduism*, 21.

⁴⁸ Bharti, *Learn Everything About Hinduism*, 23.

⁴⁹ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 92.

⁵⁰ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 93.

⁵¹ This point was pressed home to me during a personal conversation I had with an Indian Hindu business owner in our community. While she explained that she was either unaware of or had rejected many of the tenets of Hinduism, she still clung strongly to her sense of duty, particularly with regard for the wellbeing of her parents, as well as her husband, who has had various health struggles. This was of particular interest to me, because she had been married for nearly thirty years, and her marriage was an arranged marriage. Her duty toward her parents (who live in India) took the shape of sending them money, making frequent phone calls to them, and traveling to India to be with them during a health crisis. These values were extremely important to her and even central to her self-identity.

⁵² Bharti, *Learn Everything About Hinduism*, 58.

covetousness, anger, greed, delusion, egoistical pride, and jealousy.⁵³ Hindus also emphasize the preeminence of conscience in navigating ethical questions.⁵⁴

A cursory consideration of the moral values of Hinduism shows that these ethics are common to Christianity as well, but a fruitful point of discussion for the Christian evangelist is to emphasize our own inability in attaining God's righteousness and to show that this sort of righteousness can be truly attained only by faith in Christ and the inner working of the Holy Spirit. A further point of emphasis is that the entire Hindu schematic of salvation as outlined above feels humanly futile. Hindus hope to advance in the next life, but this is not assured to their minds. They can never know if they have been good enough. Conversely, the Christian rests with assurance in the promises of God to save the believing sinner, and the assurance of the Holy Spirit to transform us, day by day, into the image of Christ.

Another prominent Hindu teaching is the principle of karma, which may be simply defined as action.⁵⁵ Action is everything we do—our physical movements, words, and thoughts.⁵⁶ Karma is central to Hinduism; it is the “concept of cause and effect, specifically the belief that all actions create a corresponding result.”⁵⁷ Of course, this idea is not monolithic within Hinduism, and Bharti goes on to describe the “six major schools” of Hinduism and how each school defines karma in a somewhat unique fashion.⁵⁸ This level of detail may be unfamiliar to many average Hindus and never arise in gospel discussions, although serious students of Hinduism will be conversant with

⁵³ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 95-96.

⁵⁴ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 96-97.

⁵⁵ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 99.

⁵⁶ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 99.

⁵⁷ Bharti, *Learn Everything About Hinduism*, 19.

⁵⁸ Bharti, *Learn Everything About Hinduism*, 19-20.

these concepts.

In summary, the ultimate goal of the Hindu is to end the suffering and bondage of karma and to be united with the Supreme Spirit, no matter how many lives it takes.⁵⁹ To the Christian, the path of the Hindu seems to be one of endless hopelessness, self-doubt, and despair. It is a path of self-focus and self-righteousness. The Bible teaches us that, before God, all our righteous deeds are as soiled linens (Isa. 64:6); it is a tremendous relief to the new Christian who has toiled so long in failing efforts of self-righteousness to discover now that righteousness is found in Christ and not self. Hindus have no such assurance and possess little confidence that the path they have walked is sufficient or effective to bring about a merging with the Supreme Spirit in the life to come. Such a philosophy of life may lead to moral and ethical improvements, but it can never lead to true salvation; for we cannot save ourselves.

The Rituals of Hinduism

As is common among world religions, Hinduism stipulates many spiritual rituals that are important to Hindu life. Hindu rituals may take place in the home, such as the drawing of artistic designs, worshiping at a family shrine, or reciting a prayer. There are also life-cycle rituals, such as the ashramas, pregnancy, birth, Upanayana for maturing boys, marriage, and death.⁶⁰ A full detailing of the historic and spiritual development of these rituals is beyond the scope of this paper. However, these are clear points for gospel outreach and the manifestation of the spirit of Christian liberty for the Christian evangelist.

Regarding these rituals, Christians may ask their Hindu friends leading questions such as, “What rituals do you perform? Where do you perform them? What is

⁵⁹ Srinivasan, *Hinduism*, 102.

⁶⁰ Bharti, *Learn Everything About Hinduism*, 39-45.

the purpose of the ritual? Which god are you worshipping through these rituals?” It is important for Christians to avoid an arrogant or attacking posture in raising these questions but instead to seek humbly and patiently, in order to understand the thinking and actions of their Hindu friends.

Furthermore, these rituals may be, to the mind of the Hindu, cultural rather than religious; while, to the Christian, the religious overtones may be abundantly clear. The spirit of Christian liberty, which is the spirit that love is greater than knowledge, requires that, as a Hindu is asking spiritual questions and seeking Christ, the Christian does not attack him for his rituals but seeks to engage in fruitful conversation.

Summary of Hindu Thought

Samarpan makes a thoughtful statement: “Every religion is based on the acceptance of life after death in some form till one becomes divine.”⁶¹ This may be the perspective of the Hindu, but it is not the perspective of the Christian, and it is a distinction worthy of conversation between Hindus and Christians. In Christianity, no person will ever become divine. Instead, the Christian will joyfully worship the Triune God for all eternity. This is significant because such a stated focus of Hinduism is essentially centered on the self; conversely, the worship of the Christian must be completely focused on God.

For the Christian evangelist, one of the greatest tools in his spiritual toolbox is the balance of knowledge, patience, and love. A Christian evangelist who wishes to bring Hindus to Christ must take the time to understand their philosophy, worldview, and ritual practices, so as not to be confused nor misled by statements that their Hindu friends may make. Furthermore, the Christian evangelist demonstrates Christ’s love by learning about the individual and their way of thinking, rather than making blunt generalizations about

⁶¹ Samarpan, *Living Hinduism*, 236.

Hindus and Hinduism that may not be true of the individual and may actually lead him away from Christ.

Hinduism in the United States

To this point in our study, we have focused on the nature of Hinduism as developed in India, because that forms the essence of what Hinduism is; but, because of the welcoming immigration laws in the United States, Hinduism is growing in size and influence in American communities, as well. American Hinduism has adapted to a new culture, while still retaining its core identity of Indian heritage. In fact, understanding this interrelationship of Hindu dogma and Indian culture in the United States is important for the Christian evangelist because the vast majority of Indian Hindus in America are far more closely tied to their ancient culture than their “spirituality,” in a manner of speaking. Indian Hindus may not understand the spiritual inner workings of Hinduism, but they do understand and deeply value the traditions of their families and ancestors, going back many generations.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Hinduism was introduced to American culture through the practice of yoga.⁶² While yoga is a popular American pastime, Hinduism possessed only a minimal presence and influence in American society until after World War 2. In 1965, there were significant changes to United States’ immigration laws, which led to a tremendous influx in Indian immigration and, thus, Hindu influence and worship.⁶³ The confluence of Hinduism, Indian culture, and American society has discernibly impacted all three elements. An understanding of the impact of American society on Hinduism and Hindu practice is important for the Christian evangelist, because it reveals the importance of getting to know the individual

⁶² Harold G. Coward, John R. Hinnells, and Raymond Brady Williams. *The South Asian Religious Diaspora in Britain, Canada, and the United States*. (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000): 228.

⁶³ Coward, Hinnells, and Williams, *The South Asian Religious Diaspora*, 230.

and their personal thought processes, rather than making broad generalizations about Hinduism during the evangelism process.

Harold Coward, John Hinnells, and Raymond Williams discuss the idea that, due to the vast number of Indian Hindu immigrants in the United States, Hinduism in America has become more clearly defined and slightly less nuanced. Even Hindus have a better understanding of what they believe because they have been forced to ask and answer questions never previously considered.⁶⁴

Another impact is demonstrated by the interrelationships within various Indian sects. In India, the Hindu population is socially segregated. There are numerous sects and tribes of Indian Hindus that have widely disparate views of Hinduism. In American society, these sects have become largely homogenized and integrated with one another and have been compelled to cooperate with one another in ways that would not historically occur in India.⁶⁵ Such cooperation among sects can lead to disagreement or discussion on basic questions such as, “If the Hindu community cooperates together to build a Hindu temple, which deity shall be worshipped in the temple?” Because of the immense pantheon of gods, coming to an agreement on such a basic question has been historically difficult and divisive in India, but American Hindus are devising pragmatic solutions.⁶⁶

American culture has also impacted the practical nature of Hindu worship and ritual. Some elements of Hindu ritual seem to be derived from Christianity; Coward, Hinnells, and Williams give a description of typical Hindu worship in the United States, such as meeting in homes for devotions, prayers, singing, and fellowship.⁶⁷ These

⁶⁴ Coward, Hinnells, and Williams, *The South Asian Religious Diaspora*, 234.

⁶⁵ Coward, Hinnells, and Williams, *The South Asian Religious Diaspora*, 224.

⁶⁶ Coward, Hinnells, and Williams, *The South Asian Religious Diaspora*, 225.

⁶⁷ Coward, Hinnells, and Williams, *The South Asian Religious Diaspora*, 223.

informal ritualistic practices are in addition to formal temple worship and ritual. A point of interest is that, even if the average Hindu rarely attends worship in the temple, he will likely perform some sort of regular ritual worship in his homes, particularly focused on family gods.⁶⁸

American culture has caused tension within the Indian Hindu worship calendar, and this is particularly manifested by the American idea of the workweek and the weekend. This tension has led to a variety of adaptations to the calendar for Hindu worship.⁶⁹ For example, a number of American Christian holidays have been repurposed by the Hindu community to accommodate the American Hindu calendar.⁷⁰ These accommodations do lead to open doors for Christian evangelists; however, Hindus may look favorably on an invitation to attend an outreach at a local church during a holiday season because they already view such a season as a time of celebration. At the same time, Hindus may not be favorably inclined to attend Sunday worship services at the local church, and gracious Christian evangelists show patience by finding other means to interact with them in the gospel from the outset.

A significant advancement within Indian culture and Hindu influence in America has been the building of Hindu temples in America; the building of temples and the evolution of Indian culture has occurred simultaneously.⁷¹ For example, the Sri Venkateswara Temple and Cultural Center is present in our own community of Novi, Michigan. This temple is one fourth of a mile from Legacy Church and is a hub of Hindu

⁶⁸ This point was pressed home to me during a personal conversation with my son's daycare provider, who is an Indian Hindu. One day when I was picking him up from the in-home daycare, I noticed an "altar" near the front door. The daycare provider explained that they rarely went to the temple but frequently worshiped at this homemade altar by removing their shoes, kneeling down, and praying to the idols present.

⁶⁹ Coward, Hinnells, and Williams, *The South Asian Religious Diaspora*, 232.

⁷⁰ Coward, Hinnells, and Williams, *The South Asian Religious Diaspora*, 233.

⁷¹ Coward, Hinnells, and Williams, *The South Asian Religious Diaspora*, 221.

worship and Indian culture in our community. This is representative of the significant Indian Hindu population in our community.

Because of the inherent socioreligious connection between the Hindu community and their local temple, the Hindu community may be open to a social-outreach event at the local evangelical church, as well. Churches that offer a number of social-religious outreach events throughout the year, such as a Christmas banquet, Easter egg hunt, Vacation Bible School, Mother's Day banquet, and other such activities have a high probability of attracting local Indian Hindus to these events. While these events function as a social outreach to the community, it is important to also graciously include an opportunity for gospel witness and gospel invitation as a part of the event. Furthermore, when offering such an outreach event, the Indian Hindu community should not feel targeted but rather invited and included.

Summary and Strategy

In conclusion, I have reviewed the history, philosophy, and practices of Hinduism, in order to show how patient Christians must be in building gospel relationships with their Hindu neighbors. Since the Christian is free in Christ to restrain his liberties, Christians who wish to reach their Hindu neighbors must patiently and humbly learn how to eliminate unnecessary gospel hinderances. In fact, such efforts truly epitomize the spirit of gospel grace within the context of Christian liberty, because a Christian who is unaware of the cultural and spiritual impediments of his Hindu neighbor toward the gospel does not possess the basic knowledge necessary to show this sort of gospel grace. In our social context of Novi, Michigan, gaining this familiarity of cultural and religious Hindu norms and patiently developing gospel relationships function as the necessary first and second steps in the gospel outreach process.

On a basic level, Christian evangelistic efforts of the Indian Hindu community are complicated by the fact that questions about Hinduism can easily be conflated with an

attack on Indian culture or even Indian intellect. Sincere Christians who desire to evangelize Hindus are not wise to engage in mental repartee, treating Hindus as a philosophical riddle to be solved or an intellectual opponent to be defeated. Such an arrogant attitude is the antithesis of the gospel grace revealed in this chapter—namely, self-sacrifice. Rather, genuine and mutual relationships should be patiently developed in a spirit of love and giving. In this way, the love of Jesus Christ will be on display in the life of the Christian, and such a lifestyle will be fairly unique in Hindu circles.

Once a relationship of grace and trust has been established with a Hindu friend, the Christian may fairly discuss his own faith and the faith of the Hindu, asking spiritual questions that the Hindu may even ask of himself. These questions form the entry point to gospel conversations. Some questions naturally rise out of sincere curiosity, such as, “What god do you worship? What do your worship rituals look like? Where and when do you worship your gods?” Other questions may dig a little deeper, such as, “What does it mean to be a good Hindu?” This particular question must be asked with care and trust, because such a question may be taken as a personal offense by Hindus. This is a helpful question, however, because many Hindus ask this question of themselves.

Other questions that may be asked include, “Why do you worship this [preferred] god rather than other gods? What are the differences between your faith and your culture?” This last question is fairly delicate, as it is likely that many Indian Hindus view religion primarily through an ethnic and cultural lens: “I am a Hindu because I am an Indian.” Because the concept of separate lives of faith, ethnicity, and culture is unfamiliar to many Indian Hindus, it is important that Christian evangelists do not merely push a Western religion upon other cultures; we are not seeking to win converts to an American way of life but rather to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In fact, this final point becomes the hinge of Christian liberty in gospel outreach, and, as we have seen throughout this chapter, the principles of Christian liberty come into play, once a basic familiarity with Hinduism and gospel relationships with

Indian Hindus have been established. Indian Hindus who become followers of Jesus may choose to hold to a number of tenets of their culture, some of which may even strike the American Christian as religious or superstitious in nature. Some former Hindus, for example, may choose to retain Indian customs such as dress or body art. They may avoid social interaction on certain days or may choose not to eat certain types of food that are common in America. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, they may remain vegan or look askance upon those who practice yoga because of its Hindu underpinnings. They may make these choices, due to the intertwining of their cultural and religious heritage, and Christian evangelists who have familiarized themselves with the tenets of Hindu teaching and have developed intimate gospel relationships with Hindus can appreciate this and empathize with this. This is precisely where Paul's Christian liberty principle of "love is greater than knowledge" comes to the forefront in the gospel relationship.

The Christian is not wise to press for lifestyle changes in these nonethical areas nor even to discuss these issues prematurely. Rather, the Indian Hindu must come to grips with the fact that Jesus Christ is not one of many in the pantheon of gods; God alone is God, and Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God, second Person of the Trinity. Even this basic Christian statement may require many hours of gracious conversation with an Indian Hindu, as it presents a serious clash in worldview and religious perspective. But the hinge of salvation turns on repentance from sin and faith in Christ, so the Christian evangelist is wise to make these points the centerpiece of the gospel presentation. The other issues raised above merely open the door for gospel conversation.

As a Christian evangelist familiarizes himself with the cultural and religious norms of his Hindu neighbors, he may carefully pursue openings to gospel conversation, earn the trust of his Hindu friend through patient and compassionate gospel conversations, and avoid derailing the gospel process by thoughtlessly offending his Hindu neighbor in nonessential areas. This embodies the spirit of Christian liberty in gospel outreach, as Paul has taught us in 1 Corinthians 8-10.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

In chapter 1, the purpose of this project was stated as teaching Christian liberty to the congregation of Legacy Church of Novi, Michigan, for the purpose of an increased gospel emphasis in our community, particularly among local Indian Hindus. While this project was specialized in scope and location, the principles of the project will prove to be beneficial to a wide range of audiences, particularly as the principles of Christian liberty and gospel outreach intersect in a variety of cultural settings.

The project had four components, intended to accomplish the purpose and goals of the project: (1) assess the current level of understanding of Christian liberty among the membership of Legacy Church; (2) present a ten-week sermon series on the nature of Christian liberty to our church;⁷² (3) as a part of the ten-week sermon series, explain the intersection of Christian liberty and gospel outreach to our congregation; and (4) develop a ministry plan to increase gospel outreach to our local Indian Hindu community.⁷³ The ministry project was implemented in the late summer and early autumn of 2022 at Legacy Church and required a total of sixteen weeks to complete.

Preparation

The project began in Week 1 with the distribution of the Christian Liberty Survey to our congregation, and a minimum of twenty adult members submitted the completed survey during Week 2 of the project. These surveys were keyed to match the

⁷² Sermon outlines available in appendix 5.

⁷³ Ministry plan available in appendix 4.

posttest surveys that were distributed after the ten-week teaching series. This goal was successfully met when a t-test demonstrated a positive statistical difference between the pre- and posttest surveys, and these results will be examined in chapter 5.

On Sunday of Week 3, I explained to our congregation that the next ten weeks of Sunday sermons would focus on 1 Corinthians 8-10 and the matter of Christian liberty. Our congregation was prepared to hear this teaching, as we had just completed studying 1 Corinthians 1-7, in anticipation of this project. Week 4 began the project in earnest. The sermon series was evaluated by five adult members of Legacy Church, consisting of two staff members, one deacon, and two laymen, and the goal was successfully met when 90 percent of the rubric was marked at sufficient and above.

Implementation

Week 4: Sermon 1

Because the teaching took place during our Sunday morning worship services, there were no unusual preparatory steps required for the venue nor series. The text for this week's sermon was 1 Corinthians 8:1-6. Paul began his thesis on Christian liberty with the phrase "now concerning," which was his typical manner of beginning a new theme in this epistle. While Paul would return numerous times to the theme of "food offered to idols," he was really discussing the matter of idolatry and the deception that Satan uses to draw people away from God and into idolatry. Paul first explained that knowledge is important, but love is essential; he then began to show the illegitimacy of idolatry on the grounds that there is only one God, and all other gods are imaginary. We went into some detail, establishing that monotheism is one of the basic tenants of the Christian religion and poses a clear line of demarcation between Christianity and many false religions, including our target religion, Hinduism.

The emphasis in this first study was that Christians must possess right knowledge, but right knowledge ought to inevitably lead to a heart of compassion for

those who are still experiencing spiritual confusion. Knowledge often leads to arrogance, but it ought, instead, lead to humility as we understand more fully who God is. On these grounds, our church was challenged to grow in knowledge and to grow even more in compassion for those who do yet know Jesus as Savior.

Week 5: Sermon 2

The text for this week's sermon was 1 Corinthians 8:7-13. Having laid out his brief introduction in the first six verses of the text, Paul dealt more intensively with the topics of idolatry and food offered to idols. In the Corinthian church, there were many Christians who had been saved out of a background of polytheism, so, even though they acknowledged the monotheistic nature of Christianity and embraced it, there was still some question in their mind about their old idols. The more mature Christians had worked through this tension and had resolved it in their minds, while newer Christians had not yet come to a lasting resolution on this issue. Within this framework, Paul explained that the older, more mature Christians needed to be highly considerate of the spiritual sensitivities of the newer Christians.

This text led to an extended discussion on the nature of the human conscience, what it is, and how it functions. The conscience is given by God but must be calibrated and recalibrated according to the Scriptures. This is an ongoing process throughout life and a mark of spiritual growth and maturity. As a corollary to the first sermon, congregants were encouraged to be considerate of those with a weak conscience, meaning those who have been recently saved and are still new in the process of recalibrating their consciences according to the Scriptures.

Week 6: Sermon 3

In this sermon, we began to examine chapter 9 of Paul's dissertation on Christian liberty. Our text was 1 Corinthians 9:1-15. Paul took a slightly different approach in this section of the text, using himself as a model of the appropriate

application or denial of Christian liberty. He defended the validity of his apostolic office, showing the legitimacy of it by his own work in the Corinthian church. He then argued persuasively that, although he possessed a number of areas of liberty before God, he had chosen not to exercise them, so that his gospel influence might increase.

Paul tightly bound the concept of Christian liberty to gospel outreach. The questions were posed to our people: what are we doing, and what are we willing to do, in order to effectively advance the gospel in our community? This question evidently struck home deeply in our congregation, as we were compelled to think deeply about the moral and ethical liberties that we enjoy before God that could potentially hinder someone's faith. Paul made the profound point that, in order for the gospel to be effective and bear fruit, there must be a spirit of sacrifice on the part of the Christian. The gospel is more important than our liberty, and this must be demonstrated by actions as well as words.

Week 7: Sermon 4

The text for this sermon was 1 Corinthians 9:15-23. In this text, Paul continued to emphasize his theme that we need to be "all in" for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Again, Paul used himself as an example- just as he was "all in" for the gospel, so also should all growing Christians be "all in" for the gospel. If Christ has radically transformed our lives by His grace, we should be willing conduits of that same grace to everyone we meet.

I challenged our church to consider their level of commitment to Christ and our gospel mission. In this sermon, I carefully distinguished Paul's gospel mission from the common themes of pragmatism, prevalent in evangelicalism in our day. To clarify, Paul was not pragmatically using any means necessary to get people to come to church, whether for a service or outreach event or some other such purpose. Rather, Paul was willing to selflessly give up every comfort of life for the gospel. He was willing to sacrifice his personal rights and conveniences, so people would be truly transformed by the grace of God. In this way, Paul's theology was dramatically different from the

pragmatic philosophies of our generation. His philosophy was not “What can I get?” but “What can I give?” In fact, Paul’s testimony of transformation by grace and the relentless demonstration of his sacrificial love were so evident that anyone who took a moment to consider his life would desire the same grace and salvation that he had been given.

Week 8: Sermon 5

This text and Bible study brought us to the end of chapter 9, as we studied 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. In this text, Paul used compelling athletic imagery to make his point, teaching us that our pursuit of gospel effectiveness ought to mirror the athlete’s dedication to triumph in competition. Paul explained how the athlete would prepare himself for competition and then, after lengthy training, would bring a winning mentality to the moment of the competition. Paul explained the parallels between the athlete and the Christian but showed that the purpose of the Christian is far greater than the purpose of the athlete. The Christian is striving for the eternal souls of men and women, which is far greater than a temporary wreath. At the end of this text, Paul used himself as an example once again. God has transformed his life and given him great purpose; other Christians should follow his example of transformation and commitment to Christ.

As we considered this text, we were compelled to consider whether or not the Christian’s lack of transformation into the image of Christ is a major detriment to gospel witness. In many ways, the gospel turns upon the hinge of transformation. The grace of God reaches the Christian in his sin, brings about repentance and faith, and, ultimately, transforms him into the image of Christ. If the Christian has short-circuited this spiritual process in his own life, why would he be motivated to share the gospel with others? If a Christian has not seen the fruits of salvation in himself, he lacks the impetus to share the joy of his salvation with lost people.

Week 9: Sermon 6

As we began examining 1 Corinthians 10:1-10, the end of this series came into view for our congregation. Ironically, the Apostle Paul did not view it in any such fashion! He had quite a few things yet to say before he would finish his thoughts to the Corinthians. It is at this point that Paul abruptly changed course in his argumentation in the text; he pivoted quickly from talking about the Grecian athlete to talking about Israel in the Old Testament. Even though Old Testament Israel experienced countless blessings from God, including God's very presence, they were not guaranteed lasting spiritual success.

If this principle was true of Old Testament Israel, it is certainly true of New Testament Christians. Paul warns to guard your hearts against influences that may pull you away from Christ and back to idolatry. We must be careful of our influence on other Christians, particularly new Christians, but we must also be wary of the feebleness of our own hearts of faith. We concluded this text by discussing the sad fate of Israel in the wilderness—though they had walked with God, Who had been visibly present with them, their spiritual end was destruction because of their faithlessness.

Week 10: Sermon 7

The text this week was 1 Corinthians 10:11-17 and thematically followed the text from last week, serving as both a warning and encouragement to Christians. On the one hand, there was a serious warning for Christians: just as Israel of old fell away from the faith, so New Testament Christians need to guard their hearts against apostasy. We discussed at some length how the Scriptures teach the doctrine of the “perseverance of the saints;” because God is the one who saves us and preserves us, no true Christian can “lose” their salvation.

Yet, as Paul pointedly described it, there is a real danger of false profession and self-delusion. A person may imitate the hallmarks of faith for a time, then fall away in the end. So Paul encouraged the Christian to constantly assess and reassess his faith for

authenticity.

At the same time, there is a tremendous comfort for the Christian, because God is truly faithful to uphold his children even through times of testing. God is faithful, and God will make a way to escape. I carefully explained that this temptation, or testing, is the temptation to fall away from the faith—meaning the temptation to apostatize, as opposed to a temptation to some sort of more common sin. Paul consistently had apostasy and a return to idolatry in view in these texts, and these are the grave sins to avoid. We also discussed the lesser application of the text, how God is faithful and present to preserve us in moments of temptation to common sins.

At the end of the text, Paul connected the concepts of the Lord's Supper and idolatrous food rituals. This is fascinating to those who are unfamiliar with a culture of idolatry, particularly from an evangelical background. The practice of the Lord's Supper seems normal to us, and to place it in juxtaposition with idolatrous food rituals seems almost sacrilegious. We understood Paul's point after careful explanation. Those who celebrate the Lord's Supper are actually sharing in the sacrifice of Christ; sharing with Christ and simultaneously sharing with idolatrous sacrifice is wicked. There is an exclusiveness to the worship of and unity with Christ which must be preserved.

Week 11: Sermon 8

In 1 Corinthians 10:18-24, Paul completed the darkest portion of his homily against idolatry before finally emerging into the light of grace. Here, Paul painted a stark picture of what is taking place in idolatrous worship. Idolatry is not merely form and ritual, but there are actual demons at play, he says—the unseen, hidden spiritual realm that stands as the very real spiritual force behind the curtain of idolatry. This particular sermon touched our church rather deeply. There is a Hindu temple just up the street from Legacy Church, and the proximity made idolatry and demonism very personal for us, because this sort of idolatry is taking place in a visible way in our own community.

So Paul explained to the Corinthians that they should never engage in idolatrous ritual. As we examined carefully in chapter 2 of this dissertation, idolatrous ritual in the temple is somewhat distinct from social activities in the temple. One is permissible, and the other is not because demons are at work. Christians should never, under any circumstances, sit at the table of demons. In fact, one of the hallmark activities of Christians is our gathering around the Lord's table, commemorating the body and blood of the Lord. Paul pointed out the harsh irony of Christians who sit both at the table of the Lord and the table of demons. This kind of spiritual cross-pollination should never happen.

Sadly, while this sermon was deeply challenging for our congregation, it also struck a negative chord with one lady who professed to be a Christian and had been attending our church for a few months with her children. She emailed me a few days later, objecting to what I had taught from the Scriptures. She said that her mother was a Taoist and worshiped in a Taoist temple, and that I was, therefore, proposing that her mother worshiped demons. She continued to affirm that God loved everybody, regardless of religion, and that I had no right to make the claims that I was making. My response to her was that Jesus Christ alone is the way, the truth, and the life, and that all who repent of their sins and turn to Christ in faith will be saved. I also affirmed that salvation is obtained exclusively through Jesus Christ. This lady wrote back that she loved her mother and would, therefore, no longer be attending Legacy Church.

While this episode saddened me, it also sharpened the point that there is incredible value in teaching the Word of God in this fashion. People are clearly hearing the gospel, and faithful exegesis is an incredible opportunity to share the life-giving truth about Jesus Christ.

Week 12: Sermon 9

First Corinthians 10:25-11:1 was the final text in our study of 1 Corinthians 8-10. The text concludes in 11:1, as Paul said, “Mimic me as I mimic Christ.” Here, Paul reached a high point in his defense of Christian liberty, particularly as it relates to the gospel, as he declared these words, “Do all to the glory of God!” This was a beautiful text to preach to our congregation because it really revealed the heart behind Christian liberty: doing whatever is necessary to honor God and to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with our community.

In this text, Paul reaffirmed that there is no issue with eating idol food in the marketplace because the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof. But then he added another scenario: eating idol food at a neighbor’s house. Paul pressed into the matter of conscience here and explained that knowledge impacts understanding and faith. When issues of faith and conscience are being challenged, Paul said, the Christian should demonstrate a spirit of deference and avoid causing offense for the sake of the gospel. The Christian does have liberty before the Lord to eat whatever he wishes, but this liberty should not be exercised in a fashion that may harm the witness of the gospel. These thoughts then led to an extended conversation on the nature of conscience, how conscience is molded over time, and how the conscience of a lost person or a weak Christian ought to be carefully accommodated in matters of liberty.

This sermon reached the pinnacle of the entire three-chapter text, as Paul said, “Do all to the glory of God.” We discussed how “the glory of God” is the revelation of God’s nature, His person and work, and how Christians may best glorify God by rightly representing Him in a community of people who do not know God. The glory of God is particularly on display when people who do not know God nor worship God see the work of God in the lives of Christians and trust Christ as a result. The glory of God, as Paul intended it, is a gospel-oriented thing; and Jesus Himself made this point in Matthew 5:16

when He said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.”

Week 13: Sermon 10

The week before, we had wrapped up our exegesis of 1 Corinthians 8-10, so this final sermon was a big-picture view of Christian liberty and its gospel implications. We first listed out the specific areas of Christian liberty that are enumerated in the New Testament, beginning with those liberties that were mentioned in 1 Corinthians 8-10: eating food offered to idols, being married or remaining single, and receiving a salary from ministerial work. Additionally, several other liberties are mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament, including eating clean or unclean food, remaining uncircumcised for men, and observing holy days. After listing these specified areas of liberty, we drew a direct line between Christian liberty and its relationship to the gospel. Christians have the right to engage in any number of these behaviors as listed above, and God is pleased with this, Paul said. But these legitimate liberties must be sacrificed if they hinder the faith of a weak, immature brother in Christ. Secondly, these liberties must be sacrificed if they hinder the faith of prospective Christians. Thirdly, legitimate liberties must never bring the Christian into bondage; rather, the Christian must always exercise self-control. Finally, as Paul pointed out in chapter 10, the Christian must be aware of the pull of the flesh to return to idolatry, and the mature Christian will gladly exercise liberty in a fashion that does not hinder his own relationship with God.

The sermon series concluded with a call for Christians to grow in grace and to demonstrate the grace of love for their fellow Christians and non-Christian acquaintances alike by being willing to forego legitimate liberties in areas where so doing would advance the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is a call for every Christian to follow Jesus, to prioritize the gospel, and to selflessly make sacrificial decisions that bring glory to God.

Post-Project Analysis

This sermon series concluded in the autumn of 2022. Following the sermon series, I collected the posttest surveys from a minimum of twenty adult members of Legacy Church. The posttest surveys were keyed to the pretest surveys, and the results of comparison between the pre- and posttest surveys will be documented in chapter 5.

I also collected five sets of sermon rubrics from the five ministry leaders identified at the beginning of this chapter. These rubrics were distributed at the beginning of the sermon series, and, each week, each of the five ministry leaders filled out a sermon rubric. By the end of the series, fifty rubrics were returned to me. The feedback was positive, with 98.75% of the feedback's qualifying as "sufficient or above," and revisions were unnecessary to the sermon series. One comment was made that a ten-week series of this sort may have been a bit excessive for our congregation. Finally, these same ministry leaders and I crafted an "Indian Hindu Outreach Strategy" for evangelizing Indian Hindus in our community.

Ministry Plan Development

In weeks 14-16, I carried on a series of conversations with the five leaders of the church regarding the development of an outreach plan to local Hindus. Development of a such a plan proved to be more complicated and nuanced than anticipated at the beginning of this project, due to many social and religious factors at play that were discovered throughout the course of the project. Our communications regarding this ministry plan took the form of personal conversations, phone calls, and email correspondence that proved helpful in shaping a streamlined approach to reaching local Hindus with the gospel.

One of the main tenets of our ministry plan, as outlined below, is the need for extensive time in developing trusting relationships, so only initial steps may be taken to begin this ministry plan. We are trusting God to bring lasting fruit from this ministry

plan, and we believe that such fruit will be seen in the years to come.

In week 15, I finished the Outreach Ministry Plan and submitted it to our ministry leaders for evaluation. The feedback was positive, with 98 percent of the rubrics' being marked at "sufficient or above," the benchmark was met, and revisions were unnecessary. As delineated in the plan, we have already begun implementing initial steps of the plan as we develop meaningful relationships with our local Indian Hindu community and seek strategic opportunities to share the gospel with them.

After the ten-week sermon series, I discovered that the posttest surveys were a bit harder to complete than pretest surveys. For one, we had to deal with the travel schedules of our congregation, complicating the timeline. As a result, a full distribution of the posttest survey took several weeks longer than expected. A second factor was that it seemed that a few people who filled out the pretest survey had left the church over the summer and early autumn and were not available to fill out the posttest survey. This led to a cumulative of sixteen identical matches and pins between the pretest and posttest surveys and five posttest surveys which did not match. The content of pretest and posttest surveys was identical.

Conclusion

The posttest surveys and sermon rubrics indicated that this sermon series was well received by our congregation, helpful to our understanding of the biblical teaching of Christian liberty and its gospel implications, and provided a strong impetus towards gospel outreach in our community. There is also an increasingly warm attitude in our congregation toward a steady diet of exegetical preaching as our congregation grows in grace and number and sees that God is working in us through His Word.

CHAPTER 5
EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Introduction

What is Christian liberty? Careful study of the Scriptures indicates that Christians possess certain ethical “rights” before God to engage in activities that are permitted and appropriate. But, as Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 8-10, an essential component of Christian liberty is the willingness and even desire of the mature Christian to sacrifice his liberties for the benefit of the gospel. On balance, Christian liberty is not a selfish thing but rather a selfless thing. As J. D. Crowley says so clearly, “Christian liberty is not about you and your freedom to do what you want to do. It’s all about the freedom to discipline yourself to be flexible for the sake of the gospel and for the sake of weaker believers.”¹

Whenever we exercise our freedom in Christ, we should also feel the profound tension of love for those who are new to faith in Christ or those who are still without Christ, and this requires the nuance of cultural and spiritual contextualization. Not everyone shares the same sense of freedoms, limitations, or inhibitions, and the exercise of our freedoms could present a serious spiritual handicap for some. Perhaps the greatest freedom of all is the freedom to love others freely and sacrificially in such a way as points them to Jesus Christ.

¹ Andrew David Naselli and J. D. Crowley. *Conscience: What It Is, How To Train It, and Loving Those Who Differ*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016): 131-132.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to increase the understanding of Christian liberty among members of Legacy Church in Novi, Michigan, so that we might more effectively communicate the gospel to Indian Hindus in our community. This is an essential purpose for our church, in order to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. If we are to effectively reach various people groups in our community, we must have a basic understanding of the presuppositions and spiritual inhibitions that prevent them from coming to faith. These sorts of issues lay at the core of Paul's teaching on this subject.

This project allowed Legacy Church to take the first steps toward becoming an effective, outreaching church. Through this project and the four goals outlined in chapter 1, members of Legacy Church were introduced to the concepts of Christian liberty and gospel outreach. Furthermore, our church was introduced to the idea of contextualizing our gospel presentation to various subcultures in our community. Over the course of this project, I have come to realize that such concepts require years, rather than weeks or months, of discipleship, in order to fully embrace and implement. Our church is on a very long curve of spiritual growth and gospel outreach, which will require many years to fully realize, but, if we delay due to the time involved, we will never begin at all. By the grace of God, we are now planting seeds of faith that will bear fruit in the years and even generations to come.

Evaluation of the Projects Goals

There were four goals for this ministry project: (1) assess the current level of understanding of Christian liberty among the membership of Legacy Church, (2) present a ten-part sermon series on the issue of gospel-centered Christian liberty in our Sunday morning worship services, (3) increase the understanding of the congregation of Legacy Church regarding the intersection of Christian liberty and gospel outreach, and (4)

develop a ministry plan to increase gospel outreach to the Indian Hindu community of Novi.

Goal 1: Christian Liberty Survey

In order to assess the understanding of Christian liberty among the congregation of Legacy Church, a Christian Liberty Survey was distributed to the membership of Legacy Church prior to the beginning of the sermon series. This goal was successfully met when a minimum of twenty completed surveys were returned prior to the start of our sermon series.

The results of the survey proved to be surprising, as a number of our church members perceived “Christian liberty” in a political fashion as referring to the liberties and freedoms of American Christians in American society. This understanding was expressed in personal notes to the side of the survey. Others expressed an understanding that salvation might be lost or some other deviant understanding of the gospel. These and similar statements provided me with a clear target and serious motivation for my sermon series to follow.

Goal 2: Sermon Series

The second goal was to present a ten-part sermon series on the issue of gospel-centered Christian liberty in our Sunday morning worship services. Initially, this was intended to be a fifteen-part sermon series, comprised of ten sermons from 1 Corinthians and five sermons from corresponding New Testament texts but was revised to ten sermons, so as not to strain the attention of our people, especially considering the time of year in which the sermon series was presented. This goal was measured by a panel of five leaders of Legacy, who used a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance of the sermon series.²

² See appendix 2.

This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level. Furthermore, there were many comments made by the membership of Legacy Church that this topic was very helpful to them personally and transformative for the spiritual understanding of our church.

During the sermon series, five leaders of Legacy filled out the “Christian Liberty Sermon Series Evaluation Tool.” Each individual filled out one rubric per sermon for a total of fifty rubrics. Because the complete data set would be very lengthy, we note the cumulative averages from each individual. The sermon series rubric assessed each sermon on a four-point scale: 1=Insufficient, 2=Requires Attention, 3=Sufficient, and 4=Exemplary. There were eight questions per rubric for a total of 400 grades given over the course of the sermon series.

Bob Hubbert graded the sermon series a cumulative average of 3.975 out of 4.

Dan Carr graded the sermon series a cumulative average of 3.7625 out of 4.

Keith Varhol graded the sermon series a cumulative average of 3.725 out of 4.

Gary Elfner graded the sermon series a cumulative average of 3.9625 out of 4.

Steve Monette graded the sermon series a cumulative average of 3.9125 out of 4.

Overall, the cumulative average of all combined rubrics was 3.867 out of 4.

Goal 3: Intersection of Christian Liberty and Gospel Outreach

The third goal was to increase the understanding of the congregation of Legacy Church, regarding the intersection of Christian liberty and gospel outreach. On the surface, those who had not studied Christian liberty carefully would not naturally connect Christian liberty with gospel outreach, but this is precisely Paul’s point in his teaching.

So a careful explanation of the organic, theological links between Christian liberty and gospel outreach was critical to the success of this sermon series.

This goal was measured by administering a post-survey, which was used to determine the change in understanding of Christian liberty among the congregation of Legacy Church.³ The goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

The “Christian Liberty Survey” was divided into two sections. Part 1 contained five questions, which disclosed the participant’s age, gender, spiritual history, and regularity of attendance at our church. Because of the nature of these questions, they are not included in the synopsis to follow. Part 2 contained nine questions, which will be discussed below. Overall, the survey revealed a significant increase of understanding among the participants related to the topic of Christian liberty ($t_{(21)} = -4.5825756486, p < .0002$).

All the questions to follow used the six-point scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Disagree Somewhat, Agree Somewhat, Agree, and Strongly Agree. Each of these answers was assigned an alphanumeric value: SD=1, D=2, DS=3, AS=4, A=5, SA=6.

Question 1 said, “I have been taught about the issue of Christian liberty.” The average pretest answer was 4.952, and the average posttest answer was 5.81.

Question 2 said, “I have been taught about the issue of Christian liberty at Legacy Church or one of the pre-merged churches.” I framed the question this way because Legacy Church is the result of a recent church merger, and I was seeking to understand the level of teaching on this issue that had been provided within the scope of our current church setting, as opposed to some other ministry setting. The average pretest

³ See appendix 1.

answer was 4.667, and the average posttest answer was 5.714.

Question 3 said, “I am aware of the various New Testament texts that explain Christian liberty.” The average pretest answer was 4.571, and the average posttest answer was 5.524.

Question 4 said, “The congregation of Legacy Church has a thorough understanding of Christian liberty.” The average pretest answer was 4.286, and the average posttest answer was 5.238.

Question 5 said, “I fully understand the biblical concept of a ‘weaker brother.’” The average pretest answer was 5, and the average posttest answer was 5.714.

Question 6 said, “I believe that a true Christian may lose his or her salvation.” The answers to this question were valued in reverse, with “SD-Strongly Disagree” being valued at 6, and “SA-Strongly Agree” being valued at 1. The average pretest answer was 5.143, and the average posttest answer was 5.524.

Question 7 said, “I believe that apostasy is a real danger for a professing Christian.” The average pretest answer was 4.19, and the average posttest answer was 4.762.

Question 8, said, “I fully understand how Christian liberty impacts the gospel outreach of Legacy Church.” The average pretest answer was 4.619, and the average posttest answer was 5.619.

Question 9 said, “It is morally permissible for a Christian to eat lunch at the cantina at the local Hindu temple (Sri Venkateswara).” This was a practical question that caused the participant to reflect on the various applications of his Christian liberty, particularly as Paul specifically dealt with these sorts of liberties in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10. The average pretest answer was 4.048, and the average posttest answer was 5.

Goal 4: Outreach Ministry Plan

The fourth goal was to develop a ministry plan to increase gospel outreach to the Indian Hindu community of Novi. This ministry plan accounted both for liberties that ought to be exercised for the sake of the gospel, as well as liberties that ought to be sacrificed for the sake of the gospel, taking into account the specific spiritual sensitivities of the local Indian Hindu community. This goal was measured by a panel of five leaders of Legacy Church, who utilized a rubric to evaluate the functionality of the plan, communication processes, training elements, provision of appropriate resources, and the action steps.⁴

The goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90% of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceed the sufficiency level. The Outreach Ministry Plan rubric assessed on a 4-point scale: 1=Insufficient, 2=Requires Attention, 3=Sufficient, and 4=Exemplary. Each individual filled out one rubric to evaluate the Outreach Ministry Plan for a total of five rubrics. Each rubric contained eight questions for a cumulative total of forty grades given.

Bob Hubbert graded the OMP a cumulative average of 4 out of 4.

Dan Carr graded the OMP a cumulative average of 3.625 out of 4.

Keith Varhol graded the OMP a cumulative average of 3.5 out of 4.

Gary Elfner graded the OMP a cumulative average of 3.75 out of 4.

Steve Monette graded the OMP a cumulative average of 3.875 out of 4.

Overall, the cumulative average was 3.75 out of 4.

The Outreach Ministry Plan is comprised of a number of interlocking parts: (1) present a church discipleship course on world religions with a special emphasis on Hinduism, (2) identify strategic ways to make personal connections with the local Indian community, (3) use our church rental service as a means of outreach and connection to

⁴ See appendix 3.

the Indian community, (4) invite guest speakers, particularly those with a background of Hinduism, to present seminars on evangelizing the Indian Hindu community, (5) teach and model outreach hospitality to our congregation, (6) identify acts of service by which our church might specifically love the Indian Hindu community, (7) avoid confrontation in gospel conversations but, rather, show patience and love, and (8) trust God to provide spiritual fruit over time.

While this ministry plan is very exciting for our church leadership, it is also a little overwhelming, as we consider the amazing scope of gospel opportunities in our community, our own responsibility to our Lord and to his Great Commission, and the length of time required to see this plan come to fruition. However, framing the Outreach Ministry Plan as we have gives our church a clear target at which to aim and a strategy for attaining these biblical goals.

Strengths of the Project

The first and greatest strength of the project was the fact that it was derived directly from the Scriptures. My degree concentration is in New Testament Exposition, and expositional preaching and teaching is my primary passion; this is the most direct means of assimilating God's truth to our hearts and lives. While our church had previously experienced some degree of expositional preaching, this extended emphasis was new and has certainly led to the short-term transformation of the church. More narrowly, careful exposition of the text in question (1 Cor. 8-10) has revealed the gospel center of Christian liberty and revolutionized our church's thinking, concerning both the gospel and Christian liberty. Because these truths are derived via exposition, no one could accuse this emphasis of being pragmatically manmade or man-centered; it is clearly God's means of reaching lost people with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Another strength of expositional preaching is that it teaches average church members how to read their Bibles well. As the preacher carefully teases out the meaning

of the text week by week, sincere church members are learning how to do their own personal study on a daily basis, and this is a very healthy means of spiritual growth.

Another strength of the project was that this sort of preaching, teaching, and vision is very attractive to sincere Christians in our community who are seeking a church home. My ministry at Legacy Church began as a church revitalization work in 2020; during the interview process, the pastoral search committee said plainly that our church was in serious decline and needed to be rescued. At the time, there were approximately forty to fifty regular attendees in the Sunday worship service (not adjusted for COVID-19). During the course of my first two years of ministry here, a number of those people left the church for a variety of reasons. However, God has seen fit to bless our ministry numerically in spite of the attrition, and we now have regular attendance of 60-70 on a Sunday morning, with more people joining all the time. Many of these people are Christians from the community who are seeking a church with exactly our sort of emphasis on thoughtful exposition.

Another strength of the project was that the renewed gospel emphasis at our church has produced significant gospel fruit in unexpected ways, besides the Indian Hindu community. In the middle of this project, God led me to begin a new children's outreach ministry. We began with two children, and, as of this writing, had over twenty in attendance at our most recent children's meeting. Many of these children are unsaved and are hearing the Word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ week by week. While these children are not necessarily Indian Hindus, they are the result of the gospel emphasis born in this project, and we are reaching new children of various ethnicities all the time.

We believe that, in time, we will have a fruitful outreach to Indian Hindus, as we prayerfully follow the steps outlined in our Outreach Ministry Plan. But, in the short term, we have already begun seeing clear fruit in other areas, as a result of our renewed gospel emphasis.

Weaknesses of the Project

This project was certainly not perfect and exposed several noteworthy weaknesses. Most prominently, I transitioned churches in the middle of my Doctor of Ministry program (and partly as a result of my doctoral program). This was not ideal for any party involved, whether myself, my former church, or my current church. In order to effectively communicate these truths, there must be a significant foundation of time, love, and trust laid in the church in order for the congregation to wholeheartedly embrace the truths being presented. As Phillips Brooks stated succinctly, preaching is “truth through personality,”⁵ and there is a significant personal side to the communication of God’s truth. Resigning my former pastorate in the middle of this program led to emotional difficulties by all parties involved, since there was so much love and trust already established in the relationship. Beginning a new pastorate led to difficulties in presenting the material, since love and trust had not been developed and requires years to develop. This was not an insurmountable obstacle, but it certainly made the process more difficult.

Another weakness of the project was that the congregation at Legacy Church had not received this sort of regular expositional preaching previously (as noted above). Therefore, while there were personal obstacles to overcome, there were also philosophical obstacles to overcome, related to how the Word of God is regularly presented. It is my conviction that exegetical preaching is the best way to present the Scriptures because it allows us to most thoroughly get into the mind of the human and divine authors. This requires a high level of study, preparation, and thinking in order to accurately understand and present God’s truth. Church members who are accustomed to a different style of preaching may look with suspicion or even distaste at such a preaching philosophy. While I went to great lengths during the candidacy process to clearly affirm that these were my theological convictions, some church members decided that my

⁵ Preaching. “Phillips Brooks: ‘Truth Through Personality’.” Accessed on December 5, 2022. <https://www.preaching.com/articles/past-masters/phillips-brooks-truth-through-personality/>.

preaching style and corresponding theological conclusions were not for them and left the church. While this was very painful at the time, it has ultimately left us with a growing and thriving church, as our people are unified and joyful in our God-given purpose.

A third weakness of the project was that the ten-week sermon series was scheduled in the late summer and early autumn of 2022, when many people in the church were traveling on vacation. This made it difficult for everyone to hear the scope and sequence week by week, and, perhaps, compelled me to repeat myself week by week more than usual for the benefit of those who had been absent. The truths in this text (1 Cor. 8-10) build on themselves and reach a grand conclusion at the end of chapter 10, so it is deflating for a church member to develop theological tension over weeks of teaching, then miss the final point because they were travelling for two Sundays. Such an obstacle is always present but seemed to be further exacerbated in the late summer and early autumn.

A fourth weakness of the project was the fact that it did not yield immediate fruit. This sort of project is truly a “seed-planting” project or even, perhaps, a “farmer-training” project, which focuses more on the vision of our church and our capability to do God’s work in the future, rather than reaping dividends right away. While there has been fruit from this project in other areas of church life and gospel ministry, we have not yet seen Indian Hindus come to faith in Christ as a result of this project.

A final weakness was ensuring that the same people who conducted the pretest survey also conducted the posttest survey. This was primarily due to the travel schedule of our congregation, as noted above. The pretest surveys were easy to secure, but the posttest surveys proved much more difficult, as I had to remind our congregation several times to complete their posttest surveys. In the end, we harvested at least twenty posttest surveys, but four of these posttest surveys were keyed differently from the pretest surveys (completed by different individuals), so the results may have been slightly skewed.

What I Would Do Differently

As per the weaknesses listed above, I would make several changes if I did this ministry project over again. First, given the option, I would not relocate churches in the middle of the Doctor of Ministry program. A significant relocation of this sort sets progress back by years for all parties involved.

Second, if a relocation must take place, then perhaps the doctoral program ought to be delayed by two years in the new location. This would be very painful for the pastor/student but may be beneficial for the new congregation.

Third, I think the ministry project may have flowed better if it had been undertaken in the beginning of the new year, rather than the late summer and early autumn. Because this was a lengthy project (i.e., months of time, rather than a weekend or two), it required significant cohesion and commitment from the congregation. Certain times of the year lend themselves more to this sort of scheduling cohesiveness than others. On the other hand, when a student is motivated to graduate within a certain timeline, these scheduling options are not always feasible.

Theological Reflections

Exegetical preaching and gospel outreach are the two great passions of my life (along with, to a lesser degree, basketball, books, music, and motorcycles). Exegetical preaching is merely the fruit of exegetical study, and this sort of Bible study has completely transformed my life. It is amazing to me, as a full-time servant of Jesus Christ, to discover how much of my life has been impacted by the daily exegesis of the Scriptures. This is a process that dates back ten years to the beginning of my ministry as a lead pastor and continues to the present. When we allow the word of God and the Spirit of God to shape our thinking, complete personal transformation is simply unavoidable.

I see these emphases in Paul's text of 1 Corinthians 8-10. As we saturate ourselves in the New Testament writings, we discover that New Testament Christianity is

fundamentally a missionary movement; one of the main goals and purposes of the true Christian is to bring others to Jesus, to help others in their walk with Jesus, and to selflessly avoid errors and even valid liberties that would hinder other relationships with Jesus Christ.

To achieve these goals requires a heart of humility and faith, putting others before ourselves, and putting Christ above everything. In fact, once our Scriptural priorities are placed in order, this sort of spiritual growth and spiritual maturity becomes organic for the church as a whole. It has been my great joy to discover that, as God is transforming me daily through the Word and the Spirit, He is also transforming His church by that same Word and Spirit. By the grace of God, our church is inexorably becoming a place where people do more than sit and simmer. Our people are being activated and powerfully unleashed to reach our community for Christ, and we are seeing the clear results of this already.

Paul's explanation of Christian liberty was focused on people groups both in and out of the church. In 1 Corinthians 8-10, the weaker brothers are already in the church. Week by week, they are sitting in the assembly, hearing the word of God, right next to people who have been Christians for years. But the faith of these weaker brothers, as Paul explains it, is not yet fully settled. For them, falling away from the faith is a very real danger, and Paul places a strong sense of responsibility on the stronger brothers in the spiritual formation of the weaker brothers. God is the One Who produces faith, God is the One Who establishes faith, God is the One Who brings fruit from faith, and God is the One Who will ultimately be glorified in the entire process! But, in God's infinite grace and wisdom, He uses human means and human instruments to cultivate the garden of faith, and this is where mature disciples play an incredibly meaningful role.

Furthermore, Paul does not define the weaker brother according to age limitations, and our church has been reminded of this many times. The weaker brothers may be older men and women who have recently come to Christ from a background of

idolatry. Conversely, the weaker brothers may be children or teens: young people who are immature in every way, due to their age, whose spiritual lives are very vulnerable. Our church must view them as weaker brothers, as well, and cultivate an atmosphere where the fledgling bud of faith may flourish and not be trampled. In all of these ways, our church is truly the garden of God.

Personal Reflections

An academic journey such as this reveals many things to us about ourselves. For one, I have anticipated the culmination of this project and this degree for years, but it was impossible to complete quickly; it requires many small steps each day. This is definitely a microcosm of life and ministry. While we may see the finish line far away, it takes us a long time to arrive there, and this can be emotionally difficult. We want it all right now! I felt this way with this project, and I have certainly felt this way with our church: the acute sense of what God is doing and will do, and the delicious torture of waiting for a resolution that requires significantly more time. Each step that God leads us is a step in the right direction, and, ultimately, a step toward Himself, but it is not the final step. I think there is something about myself, and probably something about the human psyche, that wants all the steps to be completed immediately; it is a rare person who is content to take one step at a time.

Also, I have discovered the joy of reaching out to various people groups. My personal experience with ministry and evangelistic outreach has been overwhelmingly Caucasian, but this project has brought me into direct contact with other ethnicities, primarily Indians. It has been delightful to learn what an intercultural and multicultural ministry really means and how to contextualize the gospel in a way that embraces other ethnicities with their manners and customs and inhibitions. As Paul declared, the gospel does not run roughshod over a person but is considerate of his conscience and leads him along gently by the work of the Holy Spirit through time. Seeing the gospel adapt to other

cultures, not in content but in presentation, is a special joy.

Perhaps the most intense discovery for myself has been learning the joy of learning, especially considering my background. I grew up in a subset of evangelicalism that was highly conservative and theologically inbred, so much so that they shudder even to refer to themselves as “evangelical.” This is an extremely conservative wing of the Independent Fundamentalist Baptist movement from which I have now departed. One of the characteristics of this brand of Christianity is a disdain of higher learning; I was verbally discouraged countless times from pursuing any sort of higher academic degree. Anything more than a bachelor’s degree was considered unnecessary, Bible colleges were more carefully scrutinized for philosophy and practice than theology (although philosophy and practice are necessarily derived from right theology), and seminaries were sneeringly referred to as “cemeteries.” The emotional barriers to higher education were very difficult for me to overcome, and I have lost many friends along the journey, simply because of passionately seeking God and his truth. Continual growth comes at personal cost.

Along the way, I have discovered the immense value of pursuing God and His truth, no matter what. Christians claim to be people of the Book, the Word of God. This is my core value: to study, understand, teach, and live the Word of God to the best of my ability, by the grace of God. I have discovered that many of the essential tenets of my Independent Fundamentalist Baptist upbringing are, in fact, not biblical at all; they are manmade and man-centered at the heart. Not only are they unbiblical, but, in many cases, they are also antibiblical and antigospel because they twist the gospel and present a hindrance to the gospel that God Himself never intended. This is an unspeakable tragedy because the eternal souls of men and women are at stake.

The depths of the Scriptures are immense because they are the revelation of the transcendent mind of God. After many years of education, I feel more ignorant of the Scriptures than ever, simply because my awareness of the immensity of the topic has

grown. God has grown me greatly, but, in comparison to the vast storehouse of God's truth, I have been diminished. We are reminded every day that life and eternity are not time enough to comprehend God, even as we walk more closely with Him.

Conclusion

The end of such a project and degree is just the beginning of the mission. This project has served so helpfully to provide a mission template for future ministry: what are our targets and goals, and what are the action steps to take along the way. Finishing a degree is gratifying in its own right, but the work of the degree pales in importance to the ministry to which our Lord has called us: reaching people with the gospel of Jesus Christ and discipling them into maturity. This degree has served to sharpen me and our church along the way, but the work to be done has barely begun, and we are excited at all the possibilities.

Our prayer is that we will see lasting gospel fruit from our outreach to local Indian Hindus; and, in this mission, we are reminded of the words of the Apostle Paul in Galatians 6:9. "And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up." We have God's own guarantee of success stamped upon our mission, and for this we are eternally grateful.

APPENDIX 1

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST SURVEYS

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices of Christian liberty of the participant. This research is being conducted by Pastor Benjamin Klaus at Legacy Church in Novi, Michigan for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses.

Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Part 1

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by placing an 'X' next to your answer.

1. To what age group do you belong?

___ A. 20-30

___ B. 31-40

___ C. 41-50

___ D. 51-60

___ E. 61-70

___ F. 75+

2. What is your gender?
- A. Male
 - B. Female
3. How long have you been a Christian?
- A. 1-5 years
 - B. 6-10 years
 - C. 11-20 years
 - D. 21+ years
4. How many Sunday morning worship services per month do you attend on average at Legacy Church?
- A. 1
 - B. 2
 - C. 3
 - D. 4
5. How long have you been attending Legacy Church of Novi (or one of the pre-merged churches, First Baptist Church of Novi or Orchard Hills Baptist Church of Novi)?
- A. 1-5 years
 - B. 6-10 years
 - C. 11-17 years
 - D. 18 or more years

Part 2

Directions: These questions ask for your opinion using the following scale:

SD strongly disagree
D disagree
DS disagree somewhat
AS agree somewhat
A agree
SA strongly agree

Please circle the appropriate answer in the chart below:

- | | | | | | | | |
|----|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. | I have been taught about the issue of Christian liberty. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. | I have been taught about the issue of Christian liberty at Legacy Church, or one of the pre-merged churches. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. | I am aware of the various New Testament texts that explain Christian liberty. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. | The congregation of Legacy Church has a thorough understanding of Christian liberty. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

- | | | | | | | | |
|----|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 5. | I fully understand the biblical concept of a “weaker brother.” | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6 | I believe that a true Christian may lose his or her salvation. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. | I believe that apostasy is a real danger for a professing Christian. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. | I fully understand how Christian liberty impacts the gospel outreach of Legacy Church. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9. | It is morally permissible for a Christian to eat lunch at the cantina at the local Hindu temple (Sri Venkateswara). | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

APPENDIX 2

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY SERMON SERIES
EVALUATION TOOL

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

| Christian Liberty Sermon Series Evaluation Tool | | | | | |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| 1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary | | | | | |
| Criteria | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Comments |
| Biblical Accuracy | | | | | |
| Each sermon was sound in its interpretation of Scripture. | | | | | |
| Each sermon was faithful to the theology of the Bible. | | | | | |
| Scope | | | | | |
| The content of the sermon sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address. | | | | | |
| The sermon sufficiently demonstrates a faithful expositional process. | | | | | |
| Pedagogy | | | | | |
| Each sermon was clear, containing a big idea. | | | | | |
| Each sermon provides spiritually stimulating content for the congregation. | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | | |
| Practicality | | | | | |
| The series clearly details the principles of Christian liberty. | | | | | |
| At the end of the series, congregants will fully understand the biblical concepts of Christian liberty. | | | | | |

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 3

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY MINISTRY PLAN
EVALUATION TOOL

Name of Evaluator: _____

Date: _____

| Ministry Plan Evaluation Tool | | | | | |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| 1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary | | | | | |
| Criteria | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Comments |
| The goal of the ministry plan to evangelize the Hindu community is clearly stated. | | | | | |
| The need to evangelize the Hindu community is clearly stated in the ministry plan. | | | | | |
| The material presented in the ministry plan is faithful to the Bible. | | | | | |
| The material presented in the ministry plan is theologically sound. | | | | | |
| The components of the ministry plan are well-organized and concise. | | | | | |
| A timeline for implementing the ministry plan is clearly stated. | | | | | |
| The number of people necessary for implementing the ministry plan have been stated. | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| Obstacles that may hinder implementing the ministry plan have been stated. | | | | | |
| Overall, I believe the plan, when executed, will promote the evangelism of the Hindu community through Legacy Church. | | | | | |

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 4

LONG-RANGE MINISTRY PLAN

Strategic Plan for Continued Education and Implementation of Outreach to Indian Hindus at Legacy Church of Novi, MI

The following is a long-range plan for continuing education and implementation of outreach to Indian Hindus at Legacy Church, developed by Benjamin Klaus as part of a doctoral project at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and entitled *Teaching Christian Liberty as It Relates to Gospel Outreach to Indian Hindus at Legacy Church of Novi, Michigan*.

Introduction

In response to the need for evangelizing Indian Hindus in our community, we have crafted the following Outreach Ministry Plan (OMP) for Legacy Church.

One of the main issues that has come to our attention during this process is the need for the congregation of Legacy Church to be informed about the basic religious tenets of Hinduism. Without this sort of training and context, American Christians can be surprised by many statements made by Hindus and not know how to present a thoughtful response. With this in mind, we are targeting a future date for an extended Bible study on world religions, principally focusing on Indian Hinduism and talking points that Christians may use and expect when conversing with Hindu friends.

Another major issue to consider when evangelizing Hindus, as will be delineated further below, is the need for time and patience. The evangelism process requires years of patient persistence, so we will be able to implement only initial steps of this Outreach Ministry Plan at this time.

Strategic Plan Outline

Pursue Community Introductions

When I first came to Legacy Church, I was surprised to discover that, while we live in a racially diverse community that includes thousands of Indians, our church was comprised primarily of Caucasians. There are other ethnicities represented in limited numbers, but there were no Indians in the church at all. So the first step of the Outreach Ministry Plan must be to introduce ourselves to the local Indian Hindu community, and we have already begun implementing this step. This step is simple for a variety of reasons. For example, the local Indian Hindu temple is one-quarter mile from our church, and many Indians live within walking distance of the temple and our church. We frequently see them walking by the church on the way to the temple, so it is natural to pause for a moment on the sidewalk to introduce ourselves and say hello.

Furthermore, our church has been renting its facilities to the community for a number of years. A few of the groups that rent from us, whether for volleyball, dance classes, or other community purposes, are ethnically Indian. This has not led to gospel fruit over the years, but we are determined to be much more intentional about these relationships moving forward. This intentionality would include holding gospel conversations with our guests, setting out a welcome table with church and gospel information, and taking the time to invite our guests to upcoming church events.

One recurring theme in our strategic plan discussions has been the possibility of bringing guest speakers and groups to our church for an evangelism seminar. In particular, we are interested in engaging speakers and groups who have come to Christ from a background in Hinduism and would be willing to share their insights. This will be an action step for us to take on a regular basis in the coming years.

Develop Community Relationships

On a personal level, the individuals and families of our church have many opportunities to build extensive relationships with local Hindus for the sake of the gospel. This step falls into the larger conversation, regarding the overall gospel vision of our church; a church cannot grow when the members are uninterested or unwilling to engage in gospel conversations. This starts with church leadership and church training and trickles down to the church body, as church members are taught about this need and grow in spiritual grace and maturity.

As the pastor, God has given me a number of opportunities to build meaningful relationships with the local Indian Hindu community. One opportunity is my role as a music teacher. Prior to beginning my ministry in 2007, I was employed full-time as a private music teacher, and I have continued to teach private violin, piano, and voice lessons for the past fifteen years, alongside my pastoral duties. This has led to many gospel opportunities, but, notably, one of my current violin students is a teenage Indian Hindu girl who recently asked me about Jesus. Because of our relationship, I was able to share the gospel with her, and she gave me a fair hearing.

This reveals one of the fundamental needs in sharing the gospel with Hindus: a relationship built on mutual trust and respect. In our gospel conversation, I was able to listen to her in humility as she described her family's Hindu worship practices, and I was able to respond with grace in telling her about Jesus. While this was my personal experience, a similar pattern could be repeated by any member of our church who loves Jesus and Hindus and is willing to build trusting relationships with them.

Beyond violin lessons, we run a youth orchestra program for local teens out of our church, and a number of the students in our orchestra program are Indian Hindus. We are prayerfully seeking open doors to share the gospel with them.

In addition to our music outreach, several of the young people in our church

attend the local public schools, and they naturally build friendships with Indian Hindus. For example, my son is a student at Novi High School, and he has many Indian Hindu friends. These young people have been to our house to socialize on multiple occasions. We pray to Jesus before our meals when they are present and patiently seek gospel opportunities with them.

These sorts of relationship-building experiences could be repeated in the community, in the neighborhood, at the local store, at work, or wherever our church members encounter Indian Hindus.

A final means of introduction would be to pursue service opportunities that specifically focus on the Indian Hindu community. Our desire would be to show them the love of Jesus and make a direct connection between acts of service and the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are currently exploring possibilities for acts of service and an attainable schedule for implementing these.

Avoid Community Offenses

As we discovered in the study on Indian Hinduism in chapter 3, there are a number of elements that may unfortunately and unnecessarily ostracize the Indian Hindu community towards the gospel. One of these characteristics would be an attitude of supremacy on the part of Christians, particularly White Christians. In our conversations with local Indian Hindus, we have discovered that, because Indian Hinduism is a mixture of social and religious constructs, Indian Hindus may view American Christianity as a mixture of social and religious constructs. This inaccurate assessment requires time, patience, and humility to explain. As a result, fair or not, American Christians must be willing to demonstrate humility in conversation with Indian Hindus by listening to the social and religious perspective of the Indian Hindu and giving them a fair hearing before bringing the gospel fully to bear on the conversation.

It is also helpful for Christians to point out that Christianity is not ethnically

affiliated with Caucasians but actually grew from Middle Eastern Judaism. Christians of all ethnicities follow a Jesus who was Jewish, so we are not as racially tied to our religion as is Indian Hinduism.

Another discovery is that, while there are a few devout Hindus, most Hindus seem to be nominally Hindu and may not be conversant with many of the tenets of their own religion. It is not wise to make assertions early in the conversation that may be perceived as an attack or put our Hindu acquaintances on the defensive. Gentleness, grace, and patience must be the tenor of our conversations.

Understand the Need for Time

Another significant problem to avoid is prematurely pushing too hard on the gospel conversation. As just explained, it is likely that it will take many years before the seeds of the gospel bear fruit in the heart of Indian Hindus. It took years in a person's life to instill the principles of Hinduism, and, prior to that, generations and even millennia to ingrain this cultural and religious philosophy into social framework. It is foolhardy to think that the weight of that thinking will be overturned in one or two conversations over a few weeks' time. Earnest Christians ought to prepare themselves for a spiritual battle that may take years, unless God graciously speeds along the process. But, in the normal manner of things, seeds must be planted and watered for years before bearing fruit, and our perspective on this affirms our trust in God. Pushing for quick and easy results will short-circuit the natural process of gospel seed planting and nurturing.

Conclusion

When the demographics of a community change, the demographics of the church ought to change, as well. This will naturally occur when a church is passionately pursuing its Great Commission mission; as people in the community come to faith in Christ and are added to the church, the nature of the church body will change.

However, this process is short-circuited when a church is either not fulfilling

its mission or is not intentional about facing the challenges presented by the changing demographics of society. By the grace of God, instead of viewing these changing demographics as insurmountable obstacles, we have determined to view them as God-given opportunities to reach new people with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

APPENDIX 5

SERMON SERIES EXTENDED OUTLINES

Sermon 1

Title: The Liberty and Conscience of the Christian, Part 1

Text: 1 Corinthians 8:1-6

Description: In 1 Corinthians 7:1, we see that someone from the church of Corinth had written a letter to Paul describing numerous spiritual and moral troubles in the church at Corinth; Paul's letter of 1 Corinthians is in response to this letter from the Corinthians, and he gives detailed instructions about these numerous issues. We have already considered Paul's response regarding blatant immorality in chapter 5, illegitimate lawsuits between Christians in chapter 6, and numerous marital issues, as we saw in chapter 7. Now, in chapter 8, Paul addresses an issue that is commonly known as "Christian liberty." Paul addresses this issue specifically from the point of view of the dietary habits of the Corinthians.

It is essential to understand that, in the greater division of his epistle (chapters 8-10), Paul is not talking about food, so much as he is warning against idolatry. So please understand that whatever conclusions we draw today must be held in tension with the greater revelation, which we will consider over the next few weeks.

Big Idea: Christian liberty is the freedom to love God and others selflessly.

Paul presents his thoughts to us in a series of three contrasts. We will look at the first two today.

1. Knowledge vs. Love (vv. 1-3)

- a. Verse 1—Paul introduces his topic: things (food) offered to idols. In a pithy way, Paul states that "We all have knowledge." As Paul expands on this concept, we realize that the end result of knowledge is not always positive! Knowledge is good, and even essential, but it must be held in balance by love.
- b. Verse 1—Paul is actually making a fascinating point. The knowledge of God and the Word of God are basic necessities for life, and growing in the knowledge of God and His Word is the wisest of all wise things to do. But

there can very easily be a negative side effect to growth in knowledge, which Paul points out, but we have also seen firsthand that the dangerous side effect of increasing knowledge is arrogance, self-aggrandizement, and an aura of superiority—an inflated view of ourselves, our influence, our importance. The irony of all this is simply that the correct outcome of greater knowledge ought rightly be greater humility as we come into contact with the God of all creation and are enabled by his Holy Spirit to understand more and more of His majesty. Rather than becoming arrogant, we ought to cry out like Isaiah, “Woe is me, for I am undone!” Yet, as Paul says, this is sadly not often the case. For the Corinthians, this admonition about the negative side-effects of knowledge would have been startling, given the educated society of Corinth and its reputation for intellectual oratory and rhetoric. And all of these things have value, but like strong medicine, must not be abused. As a seminarian, I am increasingly sensitive to this in my own life, and I have seen this attitude of arrogance infect church leadership across the spectrum. What a tragedy!

- c. Verse 1—So Paul’s instruction is that, as we grow in knowledge, we must of necessity grow in love and compassion toward those who journey with us and come behind us on the road of spiritual maturity, rather than belittling them for not knowing what we know, and may we desperately plead with God to give us just such a spirit. Paul recites a memorable proverb at the end of verse 1: knowledge puffs up (yourself), but charity builds up (others).
- d. Verse 2—Paul makes an ironic statement that requires further examination: the one who thinks that he is knowledgeable, or that he has achieved an acceptable level of God-competency, indicates true ignorance. One of the chief characteristics of the child of God is an enduring desire to know Him better. There must be no such thing as smug self-satisfaction in our knowledge of God.
- e. Verse 3—Paul will develop this statement more fully in chapter 13. Love is the chief characteristic of the Christian. Loving God and knowing God go hand-in-hand. To know Him is to love Him. As John says in his first epistle, we love Him because He first loved us. True knowledge of God must, thus, be very scarce because it seems to me that the love of God’s people is scattered on a million different things other than God. To be so distracted in our love for God indicates that our knowledge of Him, both intellectual and experiential, is very limited.
- f. So, to rephrase Paul, knowledge is good and even necessary, but love for God and for our fellow Christians is even better.

2. Monotheism vs. Polytheism (vv. 4-6)

- a. Verse 4—Having made the introductory statements above, Paul now delves into his topic of choice: things offered to idols. This is actually one Greek word and refers to that which was set before the idol in cultic worship (different sorts of food). Certainly, this is out of the ordinary to our Western thinking, greatly impacted as it has been by Christianity. But this is normal in other world societies, particularly in the East, and was very common in the first century.
- b. Verse 4—Paul puts this idolatrous rite in perspective: it is a sham and an illusion! There is nothing real nor substantial about it. It is like putting out cookies and milk for Santa Claus; it is like putting a tooth under your pillow for the tooth fairy. Totally mythical! There is no other God but one. This is not to say that there are not other supernatural, satanic forces at work, because there certainly are (ch. 10). We wrestle not with flesh and blood but with principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6). But these other satanic forces are not truly gods, nor can they even begin to approach the one true God in power and authority. The corollary here is the basic tenant of Christianity that we acknowledge God alone; we acknowledge Him alone because He indeed is God alone. Not just supreme, but exclusive; all other gods are the figment of man's imagination. See what Jeremiah said about cutting wood out of the forest and fabricating a god (see Jer. 10).
- c. Verses 5-6—Paul expands on this concept. Even though there are many imaginary (so-called) gods, there is only one true God. There is a fundamental aspect here of the character of the one true God. He is Creator and Sustainer of all, particularly mankind. So we are called to worship Him alone and look to Him for help. This is indeed the only reality. There are not parallel universes nor alternate realities where Yahweh does not hold jurisdiction. He alone is God alone.
- d. In fact, the biblical teaching of monotheism is one of the fundamental tenants of our faith. **Deuteronomy 4:35** *To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him.* **Deuteronomy 6:4** *“Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one,* **Psalm 83:18** *that they may know that you alone, whose name is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth.* **Isaiah 43:10** *“You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.* **Isaiah 44:6** *Thus says*

*the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. **Ephesians 4:6** one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. **1***

***Timothy 2:5** For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man^[a] Christ Jesus, **James 2:19** You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!*

- e. So Paul is setting up his argument to follow on these two tenants: love is greater than knowledge, but correct knowledge informs us that there is only one God, and all others are imaginary. For those who have grown up in a Judeo-Christian background, these are easy truths. But a vast percentage of the world population has grown up in polytheism, pantheism, effective atheism, and, thus, are called to consider this biblical teaching in detail.

Conclusion: Correct knowledge leads to correct understanding, and correct understanding leads to growing love for God and our fellow man, especially Christians.

Sermon 2

Title: The Liberty and Conscience of the Christian, Part 2

Text: 1 Corinthians 8:7-13

Description: As Paul deals with the matter of Christian liberty, he sets up his argument upon the basis of a series of contrasts. Last week we took a careful look at the first two contrasts.

In the Corinthian church, there was a spirit of great arrogance. Those who had knowledge sneered at those who were yet not so wise and even deliberately provoked them by their actions. While the older, more mature saints may not have been hindered in their faith by their own actions of liberty, they were doing damage to those who were younger and weaker in the faith, even to the point of causing some to fall away from the faith. So Paul deals first with our demeanor, then our knowledge, then our liberty.

Big Idea: Christian liberty is the freedom to love God and others selflessly.

Paul presents his thoughts to us in a series of three contrasts.

1. Knowledge vs. Love (vv. 1-3)

2. Monotheism vs. Polytheism (vv. 4-6)

3. Liberty vs. Conscience (vv. 7-13)

- a. Verse 7—Here we come to the “rub” of the issue. While Paul’s theology of monotheism is absolutely biblical and true, many Christians (particularly new Christians) had come out of a background of polytheism. While they had rejected idolatrous polytheism in favor of biblical monotheism, the implications of polytheism are fresh in their minds and consciences, and affect their mentality in life and worship.
- b. So let’s take a moment and consider more carefully the question, “Who has a weak conscience?” Charles Barrett: “There are in Corinth men who have eaten sacrificed food all their lives, and have always thought of it as sacrificed to an idol having real existence and thus bearing real spiritual significance and force. In becoming Christians they have not ceased to believe in the reality of the spiritual beings behind idols, and have accordingly not ceased to think of the food itself as having religious meaning. They are weak.”¹

¹ Barrett pg. 194

- c. By way of illustration, we may think of a weak conscience like a wound which is healing. You have sustained a deep cut, such as in surgery, and now have 100 stitches holding you together. I think of some of our friends here at church who have gone through this very thing. A person in this situation is thankful to have his health back and a brighter future, but isn't there still great sensitivity in the area which was cut? (illustration of Bob Hubbert) This is exactly what Paul is talking about with the conscience: a degree of heightened sensitivity that will heal over time but has not healed yet. We may say in a very real sense that when God saves a person, God does spiritual surgery on his soul. While a person is deeply grateful for the life-giving work of God, he may be sensitive for a while about a number of issues!
- d. Verse 7—Paul is talking here about the sensitivities of new Christians. He says some have the consciousness of an idol. Now there is only one God, and even a new Christian must acknowledge this, or he would not be a Christian! But not all the implications of his former life of idolatry have been worked out of his soul; so while his mind says one thing, his heart and conscience are in conflict, and it takes time and patience to work this out. For such a person, to eat food that had been previously offered in worship to an idol presents a moral dilemma because of the implications.
- e. Garland: "Certain actions trigger old memories and associations."² And again: "We may presume that [Paul] fully expected that the Christians would no longer worship in idol temples, participate in idol festivals, or dine at idol banquets. The issue is not just about meat bought in the market...or dining in a temple...It has to do with eating food conspicuously sacrificed to an idol, whether at a public feast, in a temple dining room, as a participant in an actual sacrifice, or in a private home."³
- f. Verse 7—So as Paul describes it, the conscience is our inner sense of right and wrong, advised as it should be by the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit. Paul here indicates that life circumstances have a real effect on our consciences as well.
- g. Verse 8—I must first point out that this particular verse has often been twisted to say the very opposite of what it clearly says. Paul says those who eat are no better, and those who do not eat are no worse. To rephrase this as a rhetorical question: is a person better off because he DOES eat? And is he worse off because he does NOT eat? No, he says. Paul is

² Garland pg. 380

³ Garland pg. 355

targeting those who are mature and knowledgeable and who thought more highly of themselves because of their knowledge.

- h. Verse 8—Regarding food offered to idols, the mature Christian ought to say, “Who cares?” The idol is totally fake! There is no substantive change, morally speaking, in food that is offered to idols. It makes zero difference, Paul says, either to God or the mature Christian if our dinner previously sat before an idol or not.
- i. Verse 9—This, then, is the practical definition of Christian liberty: some things simply do not matter. And this is the first side of the coin. We will consider the opposite side in a few moments. There are those who would make issues of everything, but, as Paul has said many times (Rom. 14, Col. 2, 1 Cor. 8, Gal. 4), some things simply do not matter, and to cause them to carry innate morality is to bind the consciences of God’s people both unnecessarily and wickedly. I say wickedly because, as the Lord Himself rebuked Peter in Acts 10 regarding foods clean and unclean (“*What God has called clean you must not call common*”), and to do so is to make ourselves a greater authority than God; this is great wickedness. The obverse is also true: so very many have made the error of crying “Liberty!” where God has clearly said “NO!” Our hearts must always be submitted to the Lordship of Christ.
- j. Verse 9—To Paul’s point, we can exercise legitimate liberty to the detriment of other Christians, and this ought never happen. This concept of “stumbling block” refers to hindering someone’s faith in Jesus Christ, and we see this throughout the New Testament: Romans 9:32, 14:13, 20-21; 1 Corinthians 1:23; 1 Peter 2:8; Jude 1:24; Revelation 2:14.
- k. Verse 10 brings us to one of two thorny issues in the text. Paul seems to refer not only to eating food offered to the idol but also going into the temple of the idol and eating there. This leads to two major questions: 1) Is Paul implying that Christians were actually eating in the temple? and 2) If so, was it possible to buy or eat food in the temple but not as an act of worship?
- l. On the one hand, Gordon Fee equates eating in the temple with cultic worship, and Paul will deal with this concept more fully in chapter 10. David Garland gives an alternative explanation: “Occasions for eating in connection with an idol or on the premises of an idol’s temple were numerous. The celebrations of many cults were closely bound up with civic and social life because religion and politics were indivisible in ancient Hellenistic city life...Individuals might also receive private invitations to a banquet at a temple...Temple banqueting rooms could be rented out for private functions, like church halls today that are rented out

for receptions. Several extant invitations beckon guests to attend banquets in a temple dining room commemorating a variety of rites of passage: weddings, childbirth, birthdays, coming of age parties, election victories, and funerals.”⁴ Charles Barret makes a similar case, explaining that the stronger Christians of Corinth felt liberty to eat in the temple.⁵

- m. Our conclusions to these questions follow. 1) Corinthian Christians were indeed eating in the temple, and 2) They were not participating in cultic sacrifice but engaging in civil discourse and interaction. In his reasoning, Paul acknowledges a sense of legitimacy to this, but this liberty, he goes on to explain, is not the whole story.
- n. Verse 10—Paul teaches us that the weak brother has not worked through the implications of meat offered to idols but is, by the example of the stronger but unloving brother, trampling on the pricks of conscience to his own detriment. Instead of going through the painstaking and time-consuming process of spiritual healing and growth and maturity, the Christian of weaker conscience short-circuits the discipleship process, tramples on his conscience, and possibly even returns to his idolatrous ways. This is like a child riding a bike too big for him and without training wheels before he is ready. (This actually reminds me of my first bike-riding experience!) He may sail along just fine for a few moments, but the crash to come is somewhat inevitable, painful, and even devastating. Another illustration would be to ask a child to set up or take down the platforms here at church—not fair.
- o. Indeed, Anthony Thiselton makes a good case that the “strong” Christians of Corinth were going into the temple deliberately to goad (in a way) the faith of the weak.⁶ This certainly is a proposition that fits the context very well, particularly considering Paul’s statements about knowledge with love and his earlier homily on the divisiveness within the Corinthian church. The public exercise of liberty on the part of the stronger Christian awakened a desire within the new Christian to return to his old life of idolatry.⁷
- p. Verse 11—This brings us to the second thorny issue in the text: Paul seems to imply that the very salvation of this new brother is in doubt, but

⁴ Garland pg. 348

⁵ Barrett pg. 196

⁶ Thiselton pg. 651

⁷ Thiselton pg. 652

this creates a significant doctrinal tension. Either he is a brother, thus secure, or he is not a brother (having a profession of salvation only), and his eternity is in doubt. Fee: “In saying that the brother or sister is destroyed, Paul most likely is referring to eternal loss, not simply some internal falling apart because one is behaving contrary to the dictates of conscience...For such people to return to idolatry meant to come back under its power and thus suffer eternal loss.”⁸ Our conclusion is that “once saved, always saved;” we subscribe wholeheartedly to the doctrines of eternal security and the perseverance of the saints. From God’s point of view, the absolute and ultimate salvation of an individual is not in question. But, from our point of view, we do not know the hearts of those who walk the road of faith with us.

- q. It is quite possible that an individual is being drawn to faith and is feeling the weight of the gospel without yet being truly converted, and the thoughtless actions of a more mature saint cause him to stumble and fall along the way. The irony of all of this is that the selfish exercise of liberty on the part of the more mature brother could not be in greater contrast to the utterly unselfish and life-giving sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Who died that we might live.
- r. Verse 12—Paul clarifies his statements of verse 11: our actions and attitudes as mature Christians greatly impact the faith of others. Certainly salvation is of the Lord. (*for by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourself; it is the gift of God!*) But God uses His people as His instruments to accomplish His purpose, and Paul says we may actually live at cross-purposes with God’s plan of redemption, becoming a hindrance instead of a help. Such a one, abusing his liberty in a selfish and egregious way, is setting himself directly against Jesus Christ and His saving work. This is a great shame, tragedy, and abomination.
- s. Verse 13—Finally, having carefully considered all these thoughts, Paul declares his own determination: to never again eat meat, so as to never run the risk of offending a weaker brother. Paul said this not as a command but an example, and this is the very heartbeat of Christian liberty. Doing what is most honoring to the Lord Jesus and the most beneficial to His people.

Conclusion: There are a number of threads that we need to tie together to bring our study to a firm conclusion.

⁸ Fee pg. 428

1. If your life is not obviously consumed with Jesus Christ and characterized by love for God and for others, do not speak of Christian Liberty! Christian liberty ONLY applies to those whose hearts are completely given to God in Christ.
2. Due to our knowledge and maturity in our walk with God and growth in His Word, we understand that not every issue is a life or death issue, and this is Paul's smaller point. Paul's larger point touches us deeply: even legitimate liberty must at times be freely abdicated for the good and advancement of the gospel. May God give us, His people, such a loving and sacrificial heart.
3. Over the next few chapters, Paul will expand this concept of Christian liberty to consider other specific aspects of life besides food, and we will deal with these other areas as we go.
4. Finally, we must not fear freedom but rejoice in it! Our Christian liberty is, in fact, a gift from God. Wiersbe: "Some believers remain weak because they are afraid of freedom. They are like a child old enough to go to school, who is afraid to leave home and must be taken to school every day by his mother."⁹ To Paul's point, we must exercise our legitimate spiritual freedoms with great love, care, and humility, so as to build up the faith of all we meet by the grace of God. And this is our conclusion: the great concern of the Christian is to represent the gospel of Jesus Christ to the very best of his ability to the glory of God.

⁹ Wiersbe pg. 90

Sermon 3

Title: The Graces of Gospel Leadership

Text: 1 Corinthians 9:1-15

Description: How has the gospel changed your mind?

One of the primary purposes of leadership is to provide an example for others to follow. It is wrong for everyday Christians to say, “Well, that is how the apostle Paul behaved, but he is the Apostle Paul, so his lifestyle doesn’t apply to me.” Rather, Paul’s entire purpose is to say, as I have lived, so ought you honestly aspire to live before the Lord; if not identical in every detail, yet in principle having the same motivations and commitments based upon the same Gospel and the same Lord of the Gospel. In short, the gospel completely changes our values.

Big Idea: We surrender our Christian liberties for the gospel.

This morning we would like to consider three aspects of Paul’s apostolic leadership and see how his example applies to us.

1. The Proofs of Apostolic Leadership (vv. 1-2)

- a. Verse 1—Paul begins by proving the validity of his apostolic office and asks a series of hard-hitting rhetorical questions along this line.
- b. Verse 1—Am I not free? Of course, he is. Paul possesses the same Christian liberties as every other Christian. But we don’t have to exercise every liberty we possess, just because we have it! Sometimes the exercise of our liberty is harmful and should be avoided That is Paul’s point.
- c. Verse 1—Have I not seen Christ? Yes, he had, and this was a requirement for the apostolic office (1 Cor. 15:8, referencing Acts 9 on the Damascus road). Paul is proving his call to be an apostle and the special authority that came with the office of the apostle.
- d. Verse 1—“Are you not my workmanship in the Lord?” Paul states that the Corinthian church was a direct result of his own gospel ministry, so his words ought to have profound impact on their thinking. He had not built on the foundation of another. The Christians at Corinth were directly beholden to Paul for their relationship with Christ.
- e. Verse 2—He emphasizes this again in verse 2. His apostolic office, gifting, and authority were obviously on display in his ministry among the Corinthians. “The seal of his apostleship” is actually an ironic statement, because, based on what we know of the Corinthian church, they were in

many ways a miserable failure as a church, yet Paul speaks highly of his influence among them. He apparently ministered far more frequently and far more effectively among them than in other towns and churches.

- f. His call as an apostle, his personal relationship with the risen Christ, and his effective gospel ministry in Corinth were all demonstrations of the legitimacy of his apostolic office, so the Corinthians must now acknowledge it and submit to it.

2. The Permissions of Apostolic Leadership (vv. 3-11)

- a. Verse 3—Paul begins defending himself, but why is this necessary? Someone from Corinth (7:1, probably someone from the house of Chloe; 1:11) had written to Paul, explaining these issues in the church, and one of the issues he raised to Paul was the heavy criticism of his apostolic call and lifestyle by some in the church. Paul is writing to defend his apostolic call and lifestyle. One of the criticisms against Paul was that he was not making a salary from his spiritual ministry. This was actually a common way of thinking, as it related to philosophers in that culture, who would be expected to make a living from their philosophy, and their financial success would prove the legitimacy of their philosophy. Paul disagrees.
- b. Verse 4—In the text to follow, Paul will lay out three specific areas of liberty. He will mention the first two in passing but then spend quite a bit of time, defending the third area.
- c. Verse 4—Paul mentions the first area of liberty, the matter of eating and drinking. This is not a right but a necessity for life! Clearly, Paul is not talking about eating and drinking in general but eating and drinking certain foods in certain contexts. I believe he is referring to food offered to idols, per chapters 8 and 10. Elsewhere, Paul confirms this same liberty of eating and drinking (see Rom. 14:14-15, Col. 2:16).
- d. On the basis of his rhetorical question, Paul asserts his liberty in this area. To restate, God has granted His people moral liberty in this area: to eat or drink (with obvious and explicit biblical caveats such as drunkenness, gluttony, and so forth) is no sin for the child of God.
- e. Verse 5—Paul lists a second area of liberty: marriage. He gives some examples of apostles who were married, including the brothers of Jesus and Peter. Marriage is a good and beneficial gift from God, but not everyone is required to be married. It is a liberty that does not need to be exercised, and, for some people in some situations, it is beneficial not to exercise it for the advancement of God's kingdom. Those who did marry did not sin, and those who did not marry did not sin. As with food and

drink, there are essential caveats here as well. Paul adds that this wife must be a believer who is a likeminded follower of Jesus Christ.

- f. Verse 6—Paul lists a third area of liberty: not taking a secular job but dedicating all of one’s time to the work of the ministry. This is, indeed, a great liberty for the ministers of the gospel that has benefitted me and many others greatly, but I also have spent a lot of time in ministry, working a second job to help support the family. Many ministers continue to do this as a matter of habit. Paul did as well, being, perhaps, the most famous tent maker of all time! The right to full-time ministerial employment is a liberty of the minister of the gospel, provided he is in a situation that can pay him a fair and honest living wage for his gospel work. Paul adds Barnabas to the list because he, like Paul, was well-known to the early church for working a secular job to support his ministry habit. Now Paul is going to spend quite a bit of time on this point.
- g. Verse 7—Paul expands further on this point. Gospel ministers who do effective work should be fairly compensated for their work. Paul uses rhetorical questions once again by asking what other form of employment requires the employee to work a second job to pay for the privilege to work the first job? Only in the church is there the false idea that a man who serves as a full-time pastor also has to work a second job to make ends meet, and Paul says this simply isn’t right! He actually leans into this point a bit and provides us with five examples to follow of fair compensation for service. Here are the first three.
 - i. Soldiers do not work a second job to enable them to go to war. They are well-paid for their military work.
 - ii. Farmers do not work a second job to enable them to work on the farm. They are fairly compensated by their farm work.
 - iii. Shepherds are rewarded by their efforts with the flock. Paul says it should be so in the church: a pastor who ministers faithfully and effectively among the flock should be fairly compensated for his work.
- h. Verse 8—Paul is not making up his own arguments regarding this point. Rather, there was spiritual and legal precedent for this.
- i. Verses 9-10—He is not speaking of the Roman law but of the law of Moses, and he uses an *a fortiori* argument (an argument from lesser to greater). If it is good, right, and fair that a lowly beast of the field (the ox, his fourth example) be compensated by his efforts to thresh wheat (the ox was allowed by law to eat the wheat he was threshing; see Deut. 25:4), then does not that principle doubly apply to the minister of the gospel? Paul says that the greater application of this law was for mankind. If we

should treat animals rightly (and we should; even animals must not be abused), then humans deserve far better treatment. The one who plows should be the one who reaps and benefits from his work of plowing, i.e. planting, tilling, weeding, cultivating, praying, preaching, discipling, laboring in a very real and spiritual sense. Make no mistake—spiritual work is WORK!

- j. Verse 11—Paul draws an explicit conclusion. Those who do, indeed, do spiritual work—those who pray, preach, teach, counsel, weep, sacrifice, labor, do everything in their power to help God’s people grow in grace and reach their community for Jesus Christ—have earned the right to be fully, fairly, and financially compensated for their spiritual work.
- k. Before we move on to our final point, let’s be honest. These are extremely uncomfortable truths for the people of God, for very little touches our priorities more closely than that which affects our financial decisions. But Paul has a greater, even more powerful point.

3. The Sacrifices of Apostolic Leadership (vv. 12-15)

- a. Verse 12—Paul has spent quite a bit of time, laying out the argument that, before God, it is his right and liberty to be fully supported in gospel work, and it is good and right that God’s people financially care for the man of God who stands as the messenger of God.
- b. But Paul now changes his emphasis from the responsibility of the lay Christian to the sacrifice of the man of God. If other gospel workers (apostles and pastors) deserve to be fully supported in their gospel work, does not Paul deserve this even more? He has ministered, without ceasing, to the church of God, yet he willingly sacrificed the right of full financial compensation and worked a secular job to support himself—not by constraint but by choice—so as to remove an impediment from the advancement of the Gospel. In Paul’s thinking and lifestyle, nothing was so important as the glory of God and the advancement of the gospel. Thus, Paul willingly endured any and all hardships so that the gospel could advance.
- c. Verses 13-14—Paul gives the fifth illustration of fair compensation: priests make their living in the temple, so also should gospel workers make their living from the gospel.
- d. Verse 15—Paul willingly yielded his liberty for the sake of the gospel. Indeed, he was so passionate about the advance of the gospel that he says that he would willingly give his very life, and, in the end, he actually did. Financial disadvantage was a small price to pay, so the kingdom of God may eternally benefit. We will take a fuller look at this verse next week.

Conclusion: There are two major points to conclude from our text. The first is that it is right for the people of God to financially support the man of God and the work of God. This is clear from the text! Spiritual work is a very high calling. To help a person in his relationship with God, with his family, with his employer, with his church, with his community, to develop godly character, and even to help change the course of an entire family and families for generations to come—this is the glorious calling of the man of God! And God’s people ought to view such work as extremely valuable.

But the second point is also applicable to you, so let me pose it in the form of a key question. What can we legitimately do to advance the gospel? We have many liberties in life, but, like Paul, we ought to surrender our desires, passions, and pursuits in life for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the most worthy of all causes. So the applicable question is this: what can you honestly change in your life? What can you give to God as a reasonable sacrifice, legitimately and before the Lord, so that the gospel of Jesus Christ can be effectively advanced? We, as Christians, having been called and transformed by grace, must fairly evaluate our lives so as to maximize our impact for the kingdom of God.

Sermon 4

Title: All In!

Text: 1 Corinthians 9:15-23

Description: In the first part of chapter 9, Paul has laid out a convincing argument as to why our spiritual leaders possess the God-given right to earn a living from gospel work. Last week, we considered those arguments very carefully. But Paul's point was certainly not that he needed to make more money from his ministry (v. 15); rather, his point was that he willingly gave up these liberties, so that his gospel preaching would be even more effective.

This week, Paul turns his focus squarely on his call and passion for gospel ministry. Our prayer is that we would share his gospel passion.

Big Idea: Are you all in for the gospel?

1. All Need to Hear (the message of the gospel, vv. 15-18)

- a. Verse 15—As we discussed last Sunday, Paul possessed the same Christian liberties as every other Christian (eating and drinking, marrying, making a living from his gospel work); however, he freely surrendered his rights, so that the gospel would be advanced. Now he considers this matter in greater detail.
- b. Verse 15—Paul did not give up his rights to receive praise of men, so what does it mean to “deprive of the ground for boasting?” This boast, as David Garland explains, is not a self-centered, arrogant boast but one in which Paul finds glory and honor. It is his honor to be able to serve God with his life, at no cost to the people of God,¹⁰ and he would rather die than lose God's honor for his service.
- c. Verse 16—Paul explains in greater detail that the messenger who carries the good news of salvation has nothing to boast of, compared to the one who purchased such a glorious salvation. We cannot boast of ourselves. Our glory is in the cross and in the Christ of the cross. This is like the triumph of an army at war. When the opposing force surrenders, the messengers carry the news far and wide, but the messengers did not bring

¹⁰ Garland pg. 422

- about the surrender! They simply carry the good news. In delivering the news, there is still tremendous honor. That is what Paul is talking about.
- d. Verse 16—Paul goes even further and speaks eloquently and passionately of his calling to preach the gospel. He preaches it of necessity, which is to say that he had an urgent and pressing responsibility to preach the gospel. Stated another way, Paul says that he had no choice to do anything else. As an apostle, how many career options does one have? The one who had been directly called and confirmed as an apostle by Jesus Christ had one supreme purpose in life. Indeed, he pronounces a “woe” or divine judgment upon himself if he does not fulfill this calling.
 - e. Can we say that this equally applies to us as Christians? This is not a binary choice, as in a simple matter of yes or no, but a matter of degrees. Apostles were definitely a special case, in that they were the first century, Holy Spirit-empowered messengers of divine and ongoing revelation, having met the resurrected Lord and been empowered to the revelatory task by signs and wonders (miracles)—all of which were completed at the close of the New Testament canon, when John finished writing the book of Revelation. Apostles, as Paul here describes, are a special case.
 - f. At the same time, Paul goes on to explain that all Christians certainly should consider gospel witness one of the highest priorities of life. In a church like our own, we beg God to lay this burden on the heart of many men and women, who would willingly say that, like Paul, the great purpose of their lives is to spend their days sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with everyone possible. There is a special application here to Paul, but there certainly is a broad sense of application to every Christian in the church.
 - g. Verse 17—In typical, ironic fashion, Paul explains that he has no choice in his gospel witness because God Himself has called Paul. But his motivation does matter. Paul must share the gospel, but attitude changes everything. He describes the options for obedience: willingly or unwillingly. Obedience is not an option, but willing obedience is definitely the better choice. If Paul is unwilling, he is still a slave in God’s household! The slave may not appreciate the command of the master, but he has no choice but to obey. On the other hand, for those who willingly give themselves to the work of God, there is great reward.
 - h. Verse 18—Paul states that there is a reward for willing service, which is withheld from those who are grudging in their service. The reward is that there is no abuse of the call of the apostle. This seems like a strange reward, in light of other biblical rewards of which we are aware. Jesus speaks to spiritual rewards in Matthew 6:1, and Paul himself had referred

to these rewards in 1 Corinthians 3:8-14. There is a such a thing as tangible rewards for our service, and the obedient Christian can look forward to these rewards with joy. Yet Paul indicates here that a right fulfillment of his gospel responsibility is its own reward. The ability to go about the work of God, fulfilling the divine commission, in a God-honoring way, brings with it the full assurance of God's approval and blessing.

- i. To state clearly and simply, Paul is simply grateful for the opportunity to preach the gospel for free and to see its effect in the lives of repentant sinners.

2. All Need to See (the reality of your love and commitment, vv. 19-23)

- a. Verse 19—Paul reaffirms his statement from verse 18. He is free from all men. This statement has numerous meanings, and Paul evidently intends all of them. Paul is free in the sense that he is not a slave; he is spiritually free, in that he possesses the same Christian liberties as all Christians; and he is free from the constraints of worrying about financial compensation for his spiritual work, removing an impediment to his message.
- b. Before we go on, please notice a vast difference between what Paul is proposing here and what is going on in the mass market, seeker-sensitive church movement. Paul is giving up his own rights, so that sinners could truly be saved by grace. It is not so more people would “come to church” or have a more entertaining church experience or so the content of the gospel would be less offensive to people. He does it, so the gospel of the suffering of Jesus Christ, now shared by his disciples and apostles, would have nothing but genuine humility and sacrificial love to support the message.
- c. Paul would never consider bringing himself honor or comfort in a way that would diminish gospel impact. He is intent on giving up the good things in life for the sake of the gospel—not holding on to them for his own benefit!
- d. Such is the tragic abuse of the gospel by health and wealth prosperity preachers, not to mention the mass market, big box churches of our day. There is no sense of sacrifice for the gospel of Christ. This is precisely the opposite of the heart of Paul and Jesus Christ.
- e. Verse 20—Paul becomes specific about how his “slavery” to all played out. First of all, he became a Jew to the Jews. This would have been natural for someone who was born a Jew! But there is some discussion as to what this means. Charles Barrett says that “his Judaism was no longer

of his very being, but a guise he could adopt or discard at will.”¹¹ We agree with Barrett. At times, Paul publicly submitted himself to the Mosaic law for the sake of testimony, so as not to cause an unnecessary stumbling block to the gospel. He explained this clearly at the end of chapter 8. Though he possessed the liberty to eat idol food, he determined not to do so. At other times, Paul fasted, took the vow of the Nazirites, encouraged Titus to be circumcised, or in other ways submitted himself to the Mosaic Law, as indicated at the end of verse 20.

- f. Verse 21—When Paul was among the Gentiles, he did not submit himself to the Mosaic law. It is important to notice that Paul adds an obvious stipulation: we are never libertines or hedonists! There is always a law in force to govern our behavior, but it is the law of Christ, not the Mosaic law or the law of men. The implication of verses 20-21 is that Paul lived in such a way that his lifestyle resonated with the genuineness of the gospel among whomever he lived, Jew or Gentile. He is certainly not emphasizing the joys of self-gratification but rather its very sacrifice. He is not living in a way which he even necessarily enjoyed or desired but was appreciated by his countrymen and helped them understand and accept the message of the gospel.
- g. In verse 20, he submitted himself to the Mosaic law when with the Jews, so as not to offend. In verse 21, he disregarded the Mosaic law (with regard to overall observation) when with the Gentiles, so as not to confuse. Barrett gives a very helpful synopsis of this: “Paul can adopt his varying attitude—to the Jews as a Jew, to the Gentiles as a Gentile—because he recognizes not a smaller but a greater debt to God than legalism implies. He is not related to God by legal observance, but by grace and faith, and in Christ only; but precisely in this non-legal relationship he is Christ’s slave, who owes absolute obedience not to a code...but to Christ as a person.”¹² This is deeply profound and moving because it explains why Paul was a slave to the gospel—not a slave of forced subjugation but a slave of love and loyalty and gratitude, just as with one who has been rescued from certain death and is now eternally grateful.
- h. Verse 22—We identify the weak ones here as the ones with weak consciences, as explained in 8:7-13. Barrett defines these as “Christians not yet fully emancipated from legalism.”¹³ Paul is still assisting them in

¹¹ Barrett pg. 211

¹² Barrett pg. 214

¹³ Barrett pg. 215

their faith by avoiding behaviors that would cause them to stumble in their spiritual journey. As with the Jews, Paul refused to eat meat offered to idols. We could also apply this to children! They do not need to know all the liberties of adults until they have reached an appropriate age and maturity.

- i. Verse 22b—I fear that the statement at the end of verse 22 has been greatly twisted and abused. When Paul says he became all things to all men, that is to say that he gave up all legitimate liberties that could have caused a gospel impediment. This is not to say that, among one group of people, Paul had a ponytail and tattoos and rode a Harley, while with another group of people, Paul wore black-rimmed glasses and skinny jeans and drank extra-light lattes. This understanding would do great damage to the text. Paul is not a chameleon; he is a selfless servant. Whatever sacrifice was necessary to make the gospel meaningful and compelling, Paul was willing to make it.
- j. Verse 23—Paul concludes by saying, once again, that his grand and glorious purpose is the effectiveness of the gospel message. The word “partaker” means “recipient” but does not accurately reflect Paul’s meaning; the words “partner” or “companion” better convey the meaning, as one who shares in the task of gospel witness (A. T. Robertson, contra Barrett).

Conclusion: The gospel is carried forward relentlessly by those who are “all in.” In our text today, we consider Paul’s very genuine humility and single-minded focus for the advance of the gospel. When confronted with the testimony of his life, we stand back in awe and say, “It is no wonder that he was so mightily used of God!” Our natural response must be to say, “How can I live so that God would use me this way?” Is it not the natural, native desire of the child of God to be used as a servant of the Lord? Is there not a passion that burns in our soul for God to use us as his tool, his instrument, his mouthpiece even, so that the gospel of Jesus Christ might be effectively advanced? Do we not, at some deep-heart level, desperately desire to be used by God? This was Paul’s own testimony, and he carries on in the text by passionately explaining how he lived out his calling and lifelong desire to serve Jesus Christ by preaching the gospel, no matter what. It would behoove us to share his godly passion.

The obvious problem is, as has been so eloquently articulated, “all want the mantle of the man of God (Elijah-Elisha), but none want the sackcloth.” We want the joy, the glory, the esteem, the fulfillment, without any of the heartaches, spirit wounds, and sleepless nights of turbulent prayerfulness. Paul says in so many words that you cannot have one without the other. To be used by God, as Jesus Himself taught on discipleship, will cost us

something precious. So let me ask you: “What legitimate liberty are you willing to surrender to God, so that your gospel witness may be that much more effective?”

Sermon 5

Title: In It to Win It

Text: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Description: As we come to our text this morning, we see that there is a direct relationship between our efforts for God, our focus on doing God’s work, our effectiveness for God, and our reward from God. In chapters 8-9, Paul has spoken much about the importance of single-mindedness for the gospel, and this is an extremely important matter in the church of God.

Being transformed by the gospel and reaching others with the gospel, so that God may be honored through the gospel, are our highest priorities.

Big Idea: Run to win.

1. The Training of the Olympic Athlete (vv. 24-25)

- a. Verse 24—We come to the metaphor that Paul lays out. Paul asks this question in a rhetorical way, obviously assuming that this example was well-known to the Corinthians. The image and metaphor of the Olympic athlete was known to all and understood by all, as Garland points out.¹⁴ Everybody knew about the Olympic Games.
- b. Verse 24—Paul mentions the first athletic metaphor, the race. This is a shorter race and not a full-length marathon; the official website of the Olympic games gives fascinating insight. “The *stadion*, which Leonidas won four times, was the oldest and most prestigious event at the Ancient Games. The only race at the first 13 editions (of the Olympic games), it comprised one length of the stadium, around 193m in Olympia’s case...Every subsequent race was a multiple of a *stadion*, a *stade*. The second sprint, the *diaulos*, was introduced in 724 BC and consisted of two *stades*, bringing the turning post into the equation.”¹⁵
- c. This is fascinating because the Greek word “*stadion*” is the very word for race which Paul uses here and has been transliterated into English as our very well-known word “stadium,” such as a baseball or football stadium.

¹⁴ Garland pg. 439

¹⁵ <https://www.olympic.org/ancient-olympic-games/running>

So, in this context, a *stadion* is a unit of measurement, approximately 200 yards long, so we are talking about running the 200-yard dash or multiples of that.

- d. Verse 24—Paul will speak to the matter of preparation in a moment, but first he refers to the actual competition itself. When the moment for the race has arrived, nothing else matters. At the moment the race begins, we don't ask ourselves, "Did I shut the garage door? Did I lock the front door? Did I feed the dog?" or endless other distracting questions. When the moment of competition has arrived, it is time to compete! This is the moment you have trained for. It is time to focus on that one thing and to make that moment matter more than anything else. So Paul says it is time to run. It is time to focus on one, and only one, goal. When the umpire shouts, "Play ball!" the basketball is thrown in the air for the opening tip, or the pistol shot sounds the beginning of the race, the competition is on and is all that matters. There is earnest intention and complete effort here. When the competition is finished, your energy level should be close to zero.
- e. Verse 24—At the end of the verse, Paul speaks to the prize available to the winner. This does not mean that there is competition between Christians for one prize; rather, every Christian of every age, or of all time, who runs the race God's way and finishes well will receive a godly reward. Doing the will of God is our ultimate calling and purpose! You must strive to accomplish the goal.
- f. Notice that, while that the physical prize for early Olympic winners was insignificant (such as an olive branch or woven crown), the attendant prizes were spectacular. Olympic or athletic champions were assured lives of luxury and privilege; they won financial sponsorships, the adulation of their fans, and many other privileges. So the actual prize in competition was very humble by design but was not representative of all of the prizes available.
- g. Verse 25—Paul refers now to the fact that there are multiple levels of competition. There is the level of the competition itself, as in the race day. But there is the far longer and even more difficult level of preparation for the event. Paul speaks to this here. Athletes who intend to do well the day of the competition train strenuously far in advance, so that their minds and bodies are prepared for peak performance in the moment of competition. Modern day Olympic coach Toni Minichiello gives us insight into this principle. "The reason people reach the highest level is that they can consistently produce a movement pattern that produces a level of performance—and technique leads to consistency," he explains. "And if

you take the physical side out of it, it's obviously the mental side, the determination, the drive, the enthusiasm, the enjoyment... The lack of feeling entitled, the fact you keep moving forward, keep driving yourself."¹⁶

- h. Verse 25—Here Paul uses the word “self-control,” which could also be translated as “self-restraint.” It is the voluntary giving up of some things to which we may be entitled to gain a greater benefit: a word that perfectly captures the entire message of chapters 8-9. In the context of chapters 8-10, Paul is teaching that we should not prioritize our desires for Christian liberty. We don't do things just because we feel we can and want to. Rather, legitimate liberties must be examined for their impact on our gospel witness or how they will affect other people's perceptions of Christ and the gospel.
- i. So there is the matter of physical training in the particular exercise (such as running or boxing), the matter of mental training, and the matter of self-restraint towards behaviors detrimental to the cause. This would have been very obvious to everyone who observed these Olympic games, because the bodies of the athletes were fully on display for all to see! These athletes were in top physical condition.
 - i. Gordon Fee: “Any athlete entered in the games was required to go into ten months of strict training and was subject to disqualification if he failed to do so.”¹⁷
 - ii. The ancient philosopher Epictetus says, “those who say ‘I wish to win an Olympic victory’ must consider the demanding task before them: ‘You have to submit to discipline, follow a strict diet, give up sweet-cakes, train under compulsion, at a fixed hour, in heat or in cold; you must not drink cold water, nor wine just whenever you feel like it.’”¹⁸
 - iii. Church historian Tertullian: “Athletes are set apart for more rigid training to apply themselves to the building up of their physical strength. They are kept from lavish living, from more tempting dishes, from more pleasurable drinks. They are urged on, they are subjected to tortuous toils, they are worn out. The more

¹⁶ <https://www.olympic.org/ancient-olympic-games/running>

¹⁷ Fee pg. 482

¹⁸ Garland pg. 439

strenuously they have exerted themselves, the greater is their hope of victory.”¹⁹

- j. Verse 25—Paul compares the great sacrifice of the athlete in pursuit of a physical, temporary crown with the transcendent, eternal crown awaiting the Christian from the very hand of God.
- k. So we must consider how much of our lives are characterized by self-gratification, to please ourselves, and how much of our lives are characterized by self-control and self-denial, in order to maximize our gospel impact?

2. The Training of the Spiritual Athlete (vv. 26-27)

- a. Verse 26—Paul explains that, just like an athlete, he is living his life with great purpose. But he is actually living with far greater purpose, because the competition in which he is engaged is spiritual and eternal. The souls of men and women hang in the balance, and is this not the worthiest of causes?
- b. Verse 26—Here Paul refers specifically to two athletic metaphors—running and fighting, or boxing. The phrase “running with uncertainty” “can only mean ‘as one who has no fixed goal.’ People who enter races, of course, do not do such things. Hence the absurdity of the metaphor makes its own point.”²⁰ In other words, we have a very clear goal to accomplish! Can you imagine running a sprint but not knowing where the finish line was? What a pointless and foolish endeavor.
- c. Verse 26—Regarding the phrase, “fighting, as one that beats the air,” Paul is referencing the art of boxing, very common in the first century. According to Fee, this is probably not a reference to shadow boxing, which was and is a helpful practice in its own right. Rather, Paul is referring to the vanity of constant feints in the ring without actually engaging the opponent nor landing blows. A boxer can play defense the entire fight, seeking to avoid engagement, but he will lose.²¹ These behaviors, aimless running and defensive boxing, were the opposite of Paul’s strategy. He had entered the competition to win, and he intended to do just that.

¹⁹ Garland pg. 441

²⁰ Fee pg. 483

²¹ Fee pg. 483

- d. Verse 27—Now Paul provides the lynchpin of the entire passage, going back to chapter 8. Paul’s main concern is that, as he preaches the gospel, the recipient has absolutely no earthly reason (based on Paul’s lifestyle) to reject the gospel. Indeed, based on Paul’s lifestyle, the recipient of the gospel message has every compelling reason to accept the gospel message! Far from being a turn-off to the gospel, Paul’s lifestyle was incredibly convicting for the lost person. We beg God that we might have this kind of impact, ourselves! It requires serious sacrifice, but this sort of willing and grateful sacrifice in our lives is living proof of the power of the gospel in us.
- e. Verse 27—Paul says, “I discipline my body.” Literally, *I give myself a black eye*, in reference to the sport of boxing he had just mentioned. Paul is not speaking to the concept of physical self-flagellation but of being concerned not to coddle the whimsical desires of the flesh. David Garland gives great insight. “The body is not to be understood as something inherently evil. It can serve God, be a member of Christ, and be a temple of the Holy Spirit...But it needs to be bridled because of ‘its all too ready obedience to sin’ so that it can be brought ‘into the service of God.’”²² This is the mortification of the flesh, putting to death the flesh with its affections and lusts. There is real spiritual toughness here: the ability to stand and compete in the face of great adversity.
- f. Verse 27—At the end of verse 27, the word for disqualified is *adokimos*, literally “to be reprovved or proven false.” Paul uses this term as an example to the Corinthians because he “fears that the Corinthians will fall short and fall by the wayside in the race...because of their contact with idolatry. The problem for many Corinthians is that they have disconnected their personal salvation from their calling to service and absolute allegiance to God.”²³
- g. Verse 27—Is it possible that this is the very reason that so many “Christians” do not, in fact, present the gospel? Because they know that, while they have made the most superficial profession of salvation, in reality, the truth and implications of the gospel have not penetrated their hearts, have not permeated their souls, have not transformed their lives, and their lives betray as false what their words affirm? Is it possible that so many Christians are, in a word, hypocrites? This seems to be Paul’s very implication: the gospel could not be more deadly real and serious to him.

²² Garland pg. 443

²³ Garland pg. 445

Its truths had gripped his soul and transformed his life. The truth of the gospel had not made Paul rich, but poor. This truth had not made his life more comfortable but more difficult. This truth had not made him more popular but hated by his peers. This truth did not extend his earthly life but shortened it. Yet it was the very truth of the gospel, the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ, the kingly robes of Jesus Christ traded for beggar's garments, His princely inheritance for Paul's debt of sin, and His eternal life for Paul's certain death that compelled Paul to give up everything that this world had to offer freely and willingly and live entirely for the world to come instead. Worldly-minded, materialistic, hedonistic, and popularity-driven Christians of our day will never even scratch the surface of the true meaning of the gospel.

Conclusion: When a child of God lives primarily to please himself to the detriment of a genuine relationship with God and the advancement of the gospel, he is in great sin and needs to repent. I fear that this is characteristic of the American evangelical church: an emphasis on our will, our desires, our priorities, our comforts, our convenience, our weak and silly excuses, and a de-emphasis on the work of God, the Christian walk, submission to the Holy Spirit, and the personal and corporate advancement of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I say this to our shame. May God's people repent of fleshly selfishness and return to a wholehearted love for God that willingly submits personal liberties to the work and will of God.

Sermon 6

Title: Warnings for a Blessed People

Text: 1 Corinthians 10:1-10

Description: We are now in the second half of our series on Christian liberty! The end is in sight!

In the larger context (chapters 8-10) Paul is actually arguing IN FAVOR of Christian liberty with regard to a number of specific behaviors. The Christian has tremendous freedom before the Lord to engage in any number of activities. But now Paul introduces a new emphasis: the Christian must not only be sensitive to how his behavior will impact other Christians or people who are exploring Christianity but (shockingly) how his behaviors will even impact himself and his walk of faith with God. The problems Paul is addressing aren't necessarily the specific behaviors themselves but their power to cause a person to forsake faith in Jesus Christ in favor of idolatry—thus, satanic demonism.

Big Idea: Spiritual Blessings do not guarantee long-term success.

1. Spiritual Blessings (vv. 1-5)

- a. The matter of Christian liberty falls into a greater conversation concerning the risk of forsaking the gospel of Jesus Christ and returning to idolatry. This indicates a fatal flaw in the thinking of the Corinthians. Charles Barrett suggests that the Corinthians “did not take idolatry seriously; and they did not take idolatry seriously (so the present paragraph suggests) because they believed that the Christian rites of baptism and the [Lord’s] supper secured them from any possible harm.”²⁴
- b. Barrett makes a thought-provoking point: many Christians believe that the performance of certain Christian rites, such as occasional Bible reading or church attendance, provide security from spiritual harm. There is the implication that we can do whatever want so long as we go to church occasionally or take the Lord’s supper; however, the Christian religion, Paul argues, is not a religion of sacramental rite and liturgy but a religion of genuine commitment and devotion. To make this point, Paul looks back to the example of Old Testament Israel.

²⁴ Barrett pg. 220

- c. In verses 1-4, Paul deliberately repeats the word *all* for dramatic effect. He is continuing his train of thought from the end of chapter 9. We are all in a spiritual race, and we all have one goal in mind. Paul is showing us that not everyone who claims the name of Christ does run rightly nor well nor even finish.
- d. Paul refers to Israel as “our fathers.” For the Jews, there was certainly an ethnic connection, but for all Christians, regardless of nationality, there is a spiritual legacy of faith at play here. Let’s consider their advantages.
- e. Verse 1—All our fathers were under the cloud. This refers to the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night: the Shekinah presence of God that visibly guided the Israelites through the wilderness (first mentioned in Exod. 13). The Israelites were not physically standing under a cloud but were under the leadership, authority, and protection of the cloud.
- f. Verse 1—All passed through the sea, as recounted in Exodus 14. This was the Red Sea crossing, a miracle of epic proportions to behold. Talk about seeing the hand of God at work!
- g. Verse 2—All were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. The use of the passive voice here indicates that God was the One giving these benefits of baptism by means of cloud and sea. Nor is this water baptism in the usual or literal sense, since it applies both to cloud and sea. It was a true baptism in the sense that they were “under” the cloud and sea. Please understand that the significance of the phrase here is not in the mode but in the meaning of baptism, which signifies true commitment. When the Israelites experienced these miracles of grace, when they were completely immersed, so to speak, in the miraculous works and very presence of God, they had every reason to be truly committed to God and to His leader Moses.
- h. Verse 3—All ate the same spiritual food. Specifically, this is manna, miraculously provided by grace (Exod. 15-16). There are two significances here, regarding the meaning of spiritual food. First of all, “The food and drink imparted both material and spiritual sustenance.”²⁵ Garland goes on to explain that the modifier “spiritual” refers to the source of the food and drink, and this is a very reasonable and helpful explanation.²⁶ So the source of the food and water was inherently spiritual, as being given by God; the benefit of the food and water was ultimately spiritual, as well. This is physical food with spiritual implications.

²⁵ Garland pg. 746

²⁶ Garland pg. 748

- i. Verse 4—“Drank of the spiritual drink.” This is recounted in Exodus 15-17. Paul will provide more explanation momentarily, but we immediately recall Moses’ smiting the rock twice: obediently the first time and disobediently the second time. In spite of his disobedience, God greatly blessed His people by miraculously providing them fresh water, which they desperately needed.
- j. Verse 4—There are two further clauses which require scrutiny.
 - i. “That spiritual rock followed them.” The Old Testament does not refer to this activity, but there are texts that hint at this: Exodus 17:2-7, compared with Numbers 20:2-13. These two texts, taken together, indicate that the rock of gushing water was present with Israel, both at the beginning and end of their wilderness wanderings. To my mind, the most reasonable explanation, in absence of explicit biblical data, is that the Israelites carted the rock with them around the wilderness. A rock that gushes water was a miraculous phenomenon, and they would want a memorial of it at the very least. So the rock followed them, as I understand it, because they took it with them.
 - ii. “This rock was Christ.” As A. T. Robertson says (with a bit of a smile in his voice), “We must not disgrace Paul by making him say that the pre-incarnate Christ followed the march of Israel in the shape of a lump of rock!” Yet, ultimately and in a spiritual sense, Christ was their provider of fresh water. We see this testimony in the very words of Jesus in **John 7:37-39**. *On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.”³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”*
- k. Verse 4—To tie up these thoughts conceptually, while God did provide for the physical sustenance of the Israelites in the desert, and this provision had a spiritual source, He, in greater fashion, provided for their spiritual sustenance and faith by showing Himself strong and faithful time and time again.
- l. Verse 5—Paul gives his conclusion: the Israelites were overwhelmed with spiritual advantages! But these things did not add up to spiritual faith and success. AFTER these advantages, the Israelites sinned faithlessly by heeding the evil report of the ten spies in Canaan and refusing to go into the promised land as commanded (Num. 13-14). Thus, God punished them to the extent that an entire generation (forty years’ worth!) died in the wilderness. When Paul says that their bodies were scattered, this is a vivid

picture of the vanity of life in rejecting God. All will die without hope, and, in the final assessment, our bodies will become food for the wolves and the vultures, our bones' bleaching hopelessly under the burning sun. What an incredible warning to God's people, who have everything they could ever want and need from the hand of God, yet it is not enough for them to walk by faith!

2. Do Not Guarantee Long-Term Success (vv. 6-10)

- a. Verse 6—Paul is driving to a main point here. What was true of the Israelites is also, in so many ways, true of the New Testament Christian. These spiritual principles are timeless.
- b. Verse 6—The mistakes they made were that they desire what the Bible calls “evil things.” I really appreciate the English Standard Version translation here of the word *desire*. This word is translated from the Greek word *epithumia*; this word has often been translated in such a way as to be misleading on many levels. *Epithumia* is defined by BDAG as “a great desire for something, or a desire for something forbidden.” Acceptable translations would include lust, craving, or, maybe most accurately, coveting. The problem with the common translation “lust” is that it has come to primarily represent sexual desire, which is not at all what Paul is saying here. He will get to that in a minute, but that is not the focus of the word.
- c. In spite of God's countless blessings and good provisions, the Israelites did not desire God passionately but craved evil things. The irony could not be stronger. They actually bit the very hand that fed them.
- d. Verse 7—Paul lists out the wicked things which Israel craved and the four sins to follow (idolatry, immorality, tempting Christ, complaining) are the outworking of the basic sin of strong desire for evil things.²⁷ Grammatically, these sins are parallel and equal.
- e. Verse 7—The first sin in view is the overarching sin of idolatry, which is Paul's greater point in the entire text of chapters 8-10. The next two sins are specific manifestations of idolatry, and one of the problems with these sins, besides their abuse of God's design, is that they may cause a person to reject Christ and return to idolatry. The Old Testament citation, combined with Paul's emphasis, is not condemnatory of eating nor drinking of itself under an appropriate set of circumstances. John Calvin and David Garland both point out that, in this context, eating and drinking

²⁷ Garland pg. 755

were the outworkings of an idolatrous heart.²⁸ Barrett also connects this eating and drinking with idolatrous meals.²⁹ Eating and drinking are not themselves sinful, but eating and drinking in a setting of idolatrous worship is devastating.

- f. Verse 7—The citation from Exodus 32 also mentions the sin of “playing,” which we could loosely translate in the English vernacular as “fooling around sexually.” Paul broadens this point in the next verse.
- g. Verse 8—The phrase “sexual immorality” (one word in Greek) is connected to the phrase “rose up to play” in verse 7. This word and concept refers to illicit, extramarital sexuality; i.e., sexual intercourse with persons who are not your spouse.
- h. Verse 8—Furthermore, the spiritual fallout and chastisement of immorality is devastating: 23,000 dead in one day in consequence. I believe we do well to remember that sexual fulfillment in itself is a great gift from God! Human sexuality is a part of God’s blessed design, intended for men and women within the confines of marriage. The problem is not sexuality but idolatrous, extramarital sexuality.
- i. Verse 9—Paul lists another sin to avoid: putting Christ to the test. This is a fascinating phrase, because Christ (as with the rock in vs. 4) is here, being read anachronistically into the Old Testament. Charles Barrett explains that “in the Old Testament story the people [test] the Lord by challenging his ability and will to provide the food needful for them, instead of waiting in faith for his provision.”³⁰ This account is found in Numbers 21 and is closely related to the final sin in the list.
- j. Verse 10—Our list of sins so far includes evil desires, idolatry, sexual immorality, and testing Christ. These are all obviously big sins! Now we come to what we might normally consider a “little sin,” but the Bible calls this a very big sin in the sight of God! The Israelites were chronically negative, constant complainers. How could they complain, when they had been given every good gift, every spiritual blessing and advantage, from the very hand of God? This is indeed a very “big sin” because it presumes that God is not good, God has not treated us rightly, God owes us something; thus, God is wrong, and I am right! Complaining is, in so many words, maligning the character and reputation of almighty God, slandering Him, and criticizing Him.

²⁸ Garland pg. 758

²⁹ Barret pg. 225

³⁰ Barrett pg. 225-26

- k. Notice the fallout of these sins: they were destroyed by the destroyer. The word for “destroyer” indicates “destroying angel,” or some sort of death angel. While we do not have the specific instance of this recorded in the Old Testament, this is likely synonymous with the reference to “deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh.”³¹ This would correlate to the scattered corpses of the Israelites in the wilderness. The avenging angel of God rendered judgment upon them for their faithlessness.

Conclusion: Just like the Israelites, and just like the Corinthians, it is very possible that, due to the powerful downward pull of sin and the sinful impulses of the flesh, many so-called Christians are on the way to destroying their faith and experiencing ultimate condemnation. That is Paul’s precise point. Those who reject true commitment to God and dabble with worldly, idolatrous living are leaving themselves an open door to reject Christ and experience ultimate condemnation.

³¹ Barrett pg. 226

Sermon 7

Title: Finding Victory

Text: 1 Corinthians 10:11-17

Description: This past Sunday, we considered Paul’s discussion regarding the spiritual advantages of Israel of old. As we saw, just because so-called saints of God possessed tremendous spiritual advantages or just because they had seen the hand of God work so powerfully did not in any way guarantee that their faith would endure. In fact, there are vast multitudes of people who have had these sorts of spiritual advantages but have fallen by the wayside.

Paul now turns the force of his argument squarely back to the Corinthians, and, through them, to Christians in our own society. Do not follow the example of Israel of old. Do not follow failure.

Big Idea: God offers real spiritual victory to his people.

1. Common Testing (vv. 11-14)

- a. Verse 11—Paul continues his emphasis from verses 1-4 with the repetition of the word *all*. All the Israelites experienced these blessings of God, all of them (except two) were punished for their faithlessness, and all of these circumstances are recorded in the Scriptures for the purpose of instructing New Testament Christians about the consequences of wrong decisions.
- b. Verse 11—Paul gives us a difficult phrase: “Upon whom the ends of the ages have come.” This is an eschatological statement that we will study in greater depth later on, but it simply means that God is coming toward the end of His plan for humanity. Barrett: “Paul believes that he and his correspondents [the Corinthians] are living in the last days of world history before the breaking in of the messianic age.”³²
- c. Verse 12—Paul states clearly what he had implied up until now: spiritual opportunities do not guarantee success, but they may guarantee arrogance! Arrogance is the surest, quickest means to failure, for arrogance is, at the heart of it, self-centered independence from God. The phrase “let him that thinks he stands” is typically interpreted to mean exercising spiritual strength and accomplishment, as in doing great spiritual things. But really

³² Barrett pg. 228

this refers to a self-centered mentality of being unshakeable in our faith—thinking to ourselves, “I will stand for Christ no matter what.” As David Garland says, this phrase “is shorthand for standing in the faith.”³³

- d. Paul is saying that it is false to believe that a so-called Christian can live like the heathen but remain faithful to Christ. In fact, Paul says such a person is misguided and will most likely fall back into idolatry. While the Biblical mantra “once saved always saved” holds true, the question must be asked, “Were you once truly saved? Were you ever truly saved?” Because true salvation brings about a relentless change of thinking, desire, and lifestyle.
- e. Verse 13—There is a deliberate and definite connection here between the standing and falling of verse 12 and the temptation and sin of verse 13. In the greater context, this refers not merely to falling into some unknown sin but falling away from Christ and reverting to idolatry. There are both greater and lesser lessons to be learned here. Paul is absolute with his instruction. In a lesser sense, there is no sin nor temptation that ultimately guarantees failure. In other words, the Christian does not have to sin and is not required to sin. It is not God’s will that we ever sin, and it is never necessary to sin! Furthermore, sinful temptation is a part of the shared human experience. All people experience temptation of a variety of sorts, and we are all impacted by internal and external temptations.
- f. Verse 13—Paul gives the great caveat to the matter of sinful temptation: God is faithful, God is trustworthy, God is absolutely reliable to help His children in times of spiritual difficulty. Nor will God allow the Christian to be tempted beyond his ability. This is a fascinating insight on a number of levels. First, it implies personal responsibility to resist temptation. We must resist temptation, but, beyond a certain point, we cannot resist temptation, so God has promised that He will not allow us to go beyond the breaking point.
- g. Verse 13—Furthermore, Paul states that God will inevitably provide a way of escape. We cannot say precisely what “way of escape” Paul has in mind, but the Scriptures do give us insight as to how to escape temptation. Joseph left his coat in the hand of Potiphar’s wife and fled. King David memorized, meditated, and quoted the Scriptures to guard his heart. Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, and an angel strengthened Him. The Apostle Paul prayed three times for deliverance from his thorn in the flesh, and God’s answer was that His grace was sufficient.

³³ Garland pg. 766

- h. But on a deeper level, as Fee states, the phrase “way of escape” may be better translated as “a sure end to testing.”³⁴ To rephrase, from God’s point of view, there will certainly come an end to the temptation and the test. God knows what that end is, even if we don’t. The means of escape is, ironically, not primarily discovered in seeking the way of escape but in keeping our eyes focused on Christ, Who has already declared, in His divine foreknowledge, what the end of testing will be. This fits well with the last phrase in the verse: that you may be able to bear it. This indicates that the secret of dealing with temptation is not merely to find a way to run away, but to learn to stand strong for a prolonged period of time, even when the load one bears is very heavy. The beautiful truth here is that God inserts Himself into our testing. At some point, as we look to Him for help, we sense His presence and power in a way that is far beyond us.
- i. We discover Paul’s intention in verse 13. The spiritual failures of ancient Israel did not need to be their failures. In spite of testing, they could have continued to walk with God in faith and righteousness. God had provided a way for them to escape, as He does with us; thus, their failures were their own, and their righteous condemnation was also their own.
- j. Verse 14—Paul comes back now to the overarching truth in the text. While verse 13 has lesser application to a variety of sinful temptations in life, Paul’s focus here is specifically the temptation to return to idolatry. His main point is that we must avoid, at all costs, a return to idolatry, which is apostatizing and forsaking the faith of Christ who bought you. Here we find the clearest means of escape from temptation. No matter what trials or temptations come in your life, just as God is faithful to you, be faithful to Him! Run from the very thought of idolatry and avoid behaviors and thoughts that might lead you to forsake God in favor of idols. Run from sin, and run to Christ.

2. Corporate Blessing (vv. 15-17)

- a. Verse 15—Paul presumes that his readers are thoughtful and sincere people and can easily judge the validity of his words. Idolatry is a very big deal. It has condemned the souls of millions and even billions. It possesses a selfish, winsome nature and calls us within from our souls and without from society. As a result, we must take care to guard ourselves from its siren song.

³⁴ Fee pg. 513

- b. Verse 16—Paul appears to change direction here in his argument, but, in reality, he is introducing a theme that will have real implications both for idolatry and Christianity: the fellowship and worship of the Lord’s table. He mentions it here because it parallels the themes of eating and drinking, introduced in chapter 8 and repeated again in chapter 10. Also, Paul is introducing the ideas of “one” and “many,” which will be so important to his theology about the church to follow in chapters 11-14.
- c. Verse 16—Paul uses the phrase, the “cup of blessing.” There is no actual, sacramental, salvific grace that comes from the bread and wine but ceremonial, memorial blessings. As we celebrate the Lord’s table, we are reminded of the salvific work of Christ in a fresh and meaningful way. Charles Barrett explains that this was “a technical Jewish term for the cup of wine drunk at the end of a meal as its formal close.”³⁵ This is a standard, covenantal format Paul is using that specifically signifies the salvific blessings God has poured out on us through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. The cup of the Lord’s supper represents our sharing in the sacrificial blessings of Christ. We are united with Christ Himself because of His substitutionary work on the cross. The broken bread was literal, for, in the early church, and even in many churches around the world today, each person would break off a chunk of the loaf to eat. This pictures the broken body of Jesus, shared in salvation among His people.
- d. Verse 17—Just as “all” Israel partook of the wilderness blessings of miraculous bread and water, even so do “all” Christians partake of the blessings of communion, which symbolizes the very real and eternal blessings of our salvation. Barrett makes very helpful remarks: “The Lord’s Supper comes into the discussion of food offered to idols, and thus of idolatry, in three ways.
 - i. It provides no guarantee against falling into sin.
 - ii. It was a means by which they were united to Christ in faith and loyalty.
 - iii. The one loaf broken at the Supper represented the reality of the one body of Christ; all who partook of it were united to one another because they were united to Christ.”³⁶

³⁵ Barrett pg. 231

³⁶ Barrett pg. 234

- iv. I believe that further study concerning the mode of the Lord's Supper is warranted, because my study so far has revealed that something significant is being lost in the way we dispense the elements. We will consider this in detail as we continue our study in 1 Corinthians, particularly in chapter 11.
- e. Please understand that Paul is laying the foundation here for his discussion concerning the Lord's table, which he will flesh out fully in chapter 11. What I wish to say here is that the biblical principle of worship and fellowship is tied together very tightly. The Lord's table and Christian fellowship are, themselves, reason enough for the body of Christ to gather together and to cancel other obligations and events in order to do so. This is one of the most important things we do as a church, and this worship is extremely important to our Lord. Paul is showing us that one of the main ways to escape sin and apostasy is to be united with Christ and His people—a tremendous principle for Christians of today.

Conclusion: What is Paul's point? Simply this: God has given us means to grace—a way of escape—to avoid not only momentary temptation to sin but, ultimately, apostatizing and falling away from the faith. The foolish think themselves strong in their faith, to the extent that they may live like the heathen and yet carry on in their relationship with God. Paul says this is not at all the case. Those who live like the heathen, love like the heathen, desire like the heathen, worship like the heathen, do so simply because they are heathen! In due time, what is in their heart, their lack of true faith and relationship with God, will ultimately show itself in their lives. Paul says to flee idolatry; consider yourself, whether you are truly in the faith. Let him who stands take heed, lest he fall.

Sermon 8

Title: Sit With the One Who Saved You!

Text: 1 Corinthians 10:18-24

Description: As we open our Bibles today, we discover that God is very concerned about a divided loyalty among his people. Certainly we understand this in our human relationships, particularly with marriage, as the Bible refers to many times. Husbands and wives who love their spouses are not at all ok with their spouses' carrying on affairs with other people, flirting with others, kissing others, or even holding other peoples' hands! By nature, we understand that our love, affection, and loyalty is an exclusive thing. One of the great joys of marriage is belonging to a person who belongs to you. God is very concerned with this sort of loyalty as well; He requires that we sit in fellowship exclusively with the One Who saved us. We must not divide our time and loyalty among false gods. There is only one God. He has loved us completely, offered us great and eternal salvation, and requires our wholehearted loyalty and commitment in return.

Big Idea: God requires our love and loyalty.

1. Do Not Provoke the Lord to Jealousy (vv. 18-22)

- a. Verse 18—Paul continues with the example of historic Israel. Furthermore, he refers to Israel in the wilderness, under the control of their sinful flesh, rather than being submitted to God's leading and authority. As in vv. 6 and 11, the New Testament Christian is called upon to observe the example of the spiritual failure of the Israelites of old and avoid such failure.
- b. Verse 18—Paul uses a rhetorical question here, and his presumed answer is “yes.” Eating the sacrifices is, indeed, partaking or participating in the worship of the altar. This is in reference to idolatrous worship, eating and drinking at the altar of idols, which we understand to mean participating in a feast of idolatrous worship. Some commentators, such as David Garland, believe that Paul is referencing eating the food offered to idols even in a non-worship setting, but I disagree. Israel was not “accidentally” worshiping idols by eating food offered previously to idols; rather, they were deliberately engaging in worship feasts.³⁷ As Paul plainly says further on in the text, as well as in chapter 8, the problem wasn't or isn't

³⁷ Garland pg. 787

with the food itself, even if it has been offered to idols, but with the significance of the idolatrous feast.

- c. Verse 19—Now Paul asks two more rhetorical questions about the legitimacy of idols. Idols themselves, we see in Jeremiah 10, are total vanity. They are simply blocks of wood or stone or clay and not substantive in themselves. No matter what it looks like, how seductive or evil or innocent, no matter how large or small it is, no matter what it is made from, no matter where it resides, an idol inherently carries as much power as your teddy bear at home. In similar fashion, there is no actual, substantive change in food just because it is offered in worship to idols. Food that has been presented before a statue for a period of time has not been truly changed. Meat is meat, bread is bread and water is water, no matter what religious icon it sits before.
- d. Verse 20—On a deeper level, Paul shows that there is something actual and substantive at work in idol worship. A careful examination of Thiselton’s explanation is helpful here. There is not necessarily a one-to-one ratio of demons to idols. Not every idol has its own demon, but the spirit world as a whole is the unseen force at work behind idolatry.³⁸ Behind the curtain of idolatry resides the literal spirit world of demonism, so engaging in idolatry is engaging in spiritism and demonism. Garland: “Demons do exist, and pagan sacrifice is demonic. The Corinthians will become partners with demons if they willingly participate in pagan sacrificial feasts... There is no such thing as casual sacrifice, and Christians cannot casually join in feasts honoring deities that absolutely represent demonic hostility against God.”³⁹
- e. Please understand that this holds as true today as it did in Paul’s day. Satan has not quit his mission nor gone into hiding at any point in history. We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. This spiritual realm is no place for dabbling nor fooling around in any sense whatsoever. It can bring about only your destruction. If you are a Christian, Jesus Christ has chosen you, but does your life reflect that you have chosen Christ?
- f. When a person sits at an idolatrous feast, he is worshiping demons, whether he intended to or not because that is the whole purpose of the feast! Nor is this a perspective unique to Paul. See **Leviticus 17:7**,

³⁸ Thiselton pg. 775

³⁹ Garland pg. 790

“[Israel] shall no more offer their sacrifices to ^[b]demons, after whom they have played the harlot.” **Deuteronomy 32:16-17**, “[Israel] provoked [God] to jealousy with foreign gods; With ^[e]abominations they provoked Him to anger. They sacrificed to demons, not to God.”

- g. Verse 20—At the end of the verse, Paul adds the most obvious of all statements: I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. While we cannot avoid living in a world perverted by sin and infected by Satan, there is no necessity to participate in either godless worship or lifestyle. Sitting at the table of idolatrous worship (even if you disavow idols) attributes legitimacy to those idols, and, by the same token, sitting at the Lord’s table does the same thing in our worship of Christ.
- h. Verse 21—Here we see the inherent conflict of having a divided loyalty. It is not possible to worship both God and Satan at the same time, since they are polar opposites. Paul continues his metaphor of eating at the table, because it fits with his greater theme of eating and drinking. But there is something deeper here. Garland: “Drinking the cup of someone was understood as a means of entering into a communion relationship with that person.”⁴⁰ Thus there is a logical impasse in this double-minded thinking. The true worship of God in Christ is, by definition, exclusive. Christ is the only way, the only truth, the only life; God will not share His glory with another. So we must not divide ourselves between Christ and Satan! True Christians must, of necessity, learn the meaning of wholehearted commitment to God. It is like living in Detroit and traveling to Chicago and NYC at the same time—they are obviously in opposite directions, so this is impossible. You must choose between them.
- i. Verse 22—Paul leaves off this point of the discussion with two piercing questions.
 - i. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Paul is revisiting Old Testament themes, because we are reminded numerous times in the Old Testament that the Lord our God is a jealous God (see Exod. 20:5, 34:14; Deut. 4:24, 5:9, 6:15; Josh. 24:19). Godly jealousy is God’s appropriate response to the challenge for His honor and glory. Garland: “Jealousy is connected to God’s holiness and power, and it is aroused by any form of idolatry by the covenant people.”⁴¹ God is exclusively deserving of His own glory, of the

⁴⁰ Garland pg. 791

⁴¹ Garland pg. 791-92

glory of deity and sovereignty and creation and sustenance and salvation.

- ii. Are we stronger than He? Through this question, Paul reveals that we cannot treat God lightly or disrespectfully. We may not challenge His authority and exclusivity and expect no response. Just as a parent may tolerate bad behavior from his child for a short period of time before the hammer of judgment falls, so it is with God. He will not abide having His honor desecrated by so-called Christians engaging in idolatrous behavior! This is duplicitous and dishonorable, and God is rightly jealous of His glory and honor. There is a two-fold danger here: the first, danger of forsaking Christ and returning to idolatry, and the second, danger of experiencing God's wrath because of double-minded worship.

2. Do Not Harm Others Through Your Liberty (vv. 23-24)

- a. Verse 23—Paul returns now to the main topic of the text, which is Christian liberty as it relates to idolatry. To restate, Christians certainly have liberty but ought not exercise that liberty when it may
 - i. Influence the Christian himself to return to idolatry
 - ii. Influence another Christian (specifically, a younger Christian with a weaker conscience) to return to idolatry.
 - b. Notice that this is an almost exact repetition of the maxim in 6:12, so is clearly a purposeful emphasis that Paul is making in his epistle. It is a failed pursuit for the Christian to make it his goal to seek out every liberty, and every line of demarcation, that he may discover. The focus of the Christian is never on being a libertine, without care or responsibility or accountability. The purpose of life is not to enjoy every experience afforded to us or to live life for ourselves but to focus on honoring Christ and edifying others.
 - c. Verse 23—A. T. Robertson explains why we may not use this phrase to broad-brush every issue in life. “The ‘all things’ do not include such matters as those condemned in chapter 5:1-13, 6:1-11. Paul limits the proverb to things not immoral, things not wrong *per se*. But even here
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liberty is not license.” So the *all things* cannot possibly refer to things explicitly stated as unlawful; we need only look at the Ten Commandments as an example, and Jesus’ affirmation of them, to understand that there are many things which are, indeed, unlawful for the Christian. On the other hand, there are many things that are lawful, that are permitted, that are even God’s blessings to us, that we may fully and richly enjoy! But we must compassionately consider how our exercise of liberty may impact the spiritual well-being of those around us.

- d. It would be beneficial to translate this phrase the way that Paul explains it. “All things that are lawful are not necessarily helpful.” Such a translation puts the emphasis of the saying precisely where Paul himself puts it. Many behaviors are explicitly forbidden by the Scriptures, and, therefore, may not be properly thought of as lawful. Even many things that are not specifically forbidden may not be helpful, wise, nor even moral! But we must understand that the weight of authority rests with what the Bible says and not with what it doesn’t say. In other words, we must not “go beyond what is written.” Allow the Spirit of God to move you through His Word and guide and train your conscience.
- e. Verse 24—Paul concludes (as stated in Phil. 2) that the goal of the Christian is to primarily seek the wellbeing of others. To restate, exercise your legitimate Christian liberties in such a way as to bring the greatest benefit to the body of Christ.

Conclusion: So let me wrap up Paul’s teaching with this question: how are you living—what choices are you making—to deliberately and consistently edify the body of Christ? Is it possible that you are living in such a way as to selfishly emphasize and exercise your own Christian liberty, while doing great harm to the faith of others in the body of Christ? In our next study, we will see that Paul does make provision for the legitimate exercise of Christian liberty. Christians are not locked in a tiny little box with no opportunity to enjoy the good things of life! God has, indeed, given us richly all things to enjoy, and there is, by His grace, an appropriate time and place for the legitimate exercise of these good gifts. But this liberty must never be to the harm of the body of Christ. As we are coming now to the conclusion of Paul’s study, we are understanding His paramount question: What is the ultimate goal of your life?

Sermon 9

Title: Do All to the Glory of God

Text: 1 Corinthians 10:25-11:1

Description: We come today to the final text in Paul’s great sermon on Christian liberty. In our text, of all the principles which govern our behavior as Christians, the greatest of great principles is simply this: do all to the glory of God.

What does it mean to glorify God? Simply stated, to glorify God means to reflect to the world the glory that comes from God. To show God’s greatness to the world, so that they sing His praises. In other words, by God’s grace, to reveal the perfections of God’s character—His purity, His power, His holiness, His wisdom, His grace, His patience, His justice, His forgiveness, His mercy—to the world so they see them accurately represented and ultimately worship God. Paul explains how to do this in our text today.

Big Idea: The glory of God is the rule for life.

1. Do All to the Glory of God (vv. 25-31)

- a. Verse 25—Paul gives us insight into the historical practices of the Corinthians. Meat that was being sold in the meat market had previously been offered to idols, or this wouldn’t even be a question. Paul says if you are shopping or wandering through the market, and you see a piece of meat that you want to eat, help yourself! It is no problem! If it looks good, eat it! Furthermore, do not seek out problems or create problems. We have enough real problems already, so it is totally unnecessary to create artificial problems. So do not ask any questions for the sake of conscience, and by this he means your own conscience—but, even more, the conscience of someone who may observe your purchase.
- b. Now, there is some correlation to cultural issues in our day, as well. Gordon Fee points out that Paul’s permissions here fly directly in the face of historical, conservative Jewish traditions and teachings.⁴² On the basis of their misunderstanding of the Old Testament texts and Mosaic Law, the Jewish rabbis had carefully crafted arguments that would prohibit eating meat offered to idols, as well as sitting at meals with idolaters, as Paul will mention below. But these “sacred cows” and traditions, Paul explains, are

⁴² Fee pg. 532

ultimately the construct of men and not the will of God. Fee says, “Apart from Paul’s radical statements on circumcision (i.e., that it is unnecessary), it is hard to imagine anything more un-Jewish in the apostle than this.”⁴³ Barrett: “Paul makes a clean break with Judaism, where conscience demanded of the devout Jew the most searching inquiry before he might eat.”⁴⁴

- c. As we approach these kinds of issues, we must wrestle honestly with God’s perspective of them, as opposed to seemingly logical constructs or societal norms. Let me also point out that the New Testament Christian is brought here into direct conflict with Old Testament teachings. We, as New Testament Christians, do not have biblical permission to wantonly use the Old Testament Law to support just any issue of our own choosing. I make this statement very carefully and will explain it thoroughly in our final study on Christian liberty. But please understand that much abuse and misunderstanding has been engendered through a thoughtless hermeneutic of the Old Testament, and Paul is rejecting such a hermeneutic right here. This is not to say that the Old Testament is not helpful, beneficial and even authoritative for our lives as New Testament Christians, because, to some degree, it is. To be applied correctly to our lives, the Old Testament must be understood through the lens of the New Testament.
- d. Verse 26—Paul explains why the mature Christian may freely eat of any meat sold in the market by citing the twenty-fourth Psalm. The mature Christian understands that all meat is the gift of God. It belongs to God and comes from God, so it is God’s good gift to us. God is the One Who is its source and is sovereign over it.
- e. Verse 27—Now we see another scenario: being invited to dinner with friends who do not know the Lord. This is a trickier situation than purchasing something in the market. The marketplace is impersonal and somewhat anonymous, but here we are introduced to something very personal—an ongoing relationship that includes spiritual accountability that will be affected by our dietary choices in one way or the other.
- f. First of all, Paul presumes that in the normal course of life, Christians have liberty to eat with their unsaved friends if they want. These unsaved friends may be relatives, coworkers, or neighbors—relationships that are the natural consequence of not being social hermits. Let me make a point

⁴³ Fee pg. 532

⁴⁴ Barrett pg. 240

here that Paul presumes to be true but is often sadly overlooked, abused, or even outrightly denied by Christians. It is good to have these very sorts of friendly relationships in society, as Paul goes on to clearly explain, because these relationships inevitably have direct gospel implications.

- g. Verse 27—These relationships and these dinners may lead to uncomfortable conversations that are, in fact, opportunities for gospel witness. Perhaps this very sort of discomfort is the reason why so many Christians avoid these relationships! What if you go to someone’s house, and they offer you a hamburger that you suspect previously sat before an idol? Paul says not to make an issue of it. Eat it thankfully! There is no need to create problems here.
- h. Verse 28—But what if your neighbor makes the statement, for the very reason that he knows you are a Christian and is testing your ethics, that this hamburger previously sat before an idol? Paul presumes that eating it will in no way affect your own faith, but eating it in front of your idolatrous friend may very well confirm in his mind the legitimacy of his idolatry, thus pushing him away from Christ. Paul says, we should never do this! For the Christian, the salvation of lost souls is one of our highest and noblest goals. So, with the knowledge that this is spiritually desecrated food, Paul says to graciously request something else to eat. The correct thing to say would be something like this: “You are very kind to so generously offer me this hamburger, but I am a follower of Jesus Christ and do not worship idols. Might I eat something else?” The obvious conflict here is the question of offense. What if our host is offended by our rejection of their food? But this is a small issue. The greater issue is the testimony of loyalty to Jesus Christ, as graciously and clearly as we can state it.
- i. Verse 28—Please understand what Paul does NOT mean in this verse. Fee: “The one who has pointed out the sacrificial origins of this meat to a believer has done so out of a sense of moral obligation to them, believing that Christians, like Jews, would not eat such food. So as not to offend that person, nor their moral expectations of a follower of Christ, and precisely because it is not a matter of a believer’s moral consciousness, one should forbear under these circumstances.”⁴⁵ This demonstrates and clarifies very well what is so often the abuse of these texts regarding Christian liberty: that we should not behave in certain ways because we are worried of offending our brothers and sisters in

⁴⁵ Fee pg. 535

Christ who may have stricter standards in certain areas. This is certainly a legitimate concern to some degree and a cause for genuine humility and compassion, but it is not at all what Paul has in mind in these texts, and it is an abuse of the Scriptures to make it say so.

- j. Verse 29—Four times in our text today, Paul uses the word *conscience*. This word may be defined as “moral consciousness” or “inner sense of right and wrong.” Paul points out that the core issue, offending the other person’s conscience, carries the implications of influencing them to reject Christ and remain in idolatry, or, in the case of a weak or young Christian, return to idolatry.
- k. Verse 29b—Why is my liberty judged by another man’s conscience? This is a difficult phrase to translate. On the surface, Paul seems to be saying that we should have freedom to exercise liberty unrestricted from the conscience of another, but we know this cannot be the case because Paul states numerous times that our liberty is, indeed, restricted by the consciences of others. In my view, we may best clarify the confusion by explaining the phrase this way: “Do not behave in such a way as to allow people to judge you, due to your liberty. You know you have liberty, but you do not need to flaunt it. You may, in fact, surrender your liberty, for the benefit of others, and be just fine.”
- l. Verse 30—Someone now has heard of the liberty of the stronger brother and is speaking evil of him for it. I believe (and Barrett agrees) that Paul is hinting that the liberty of the stronger brother has been a topic of gossip within the church, and now he is receiving criticism for his liberty.⁴⁶ For sincere and committed followers of Jesus Christ, this ought not happen.
- m. Verse 31—While we have hit a bumpy patch with many questions in verses 29-30, verse 31 is one of the clearest declarations of Christian purpose in all of the Bible. Playing off the themes of eating and drinking, which Paul has been emphasizing for three chapters now, Paul says that even mundane daily activities like eating and drinking must in every way be considered to bring greatest glory to God. Furthermore, Paul deliberately spreads this principle out to cover other areas of life: whatever we do. Eating and drinking forms the most basic of all basic life activities. We must apply this principle to all areas of life: the heartbeat of the Christian is our daily cry, glory to God! Glory to God! Uphold the holy, glorious name of God! Bring Him honor in every way!

⁴⁶ Barrett pg. 244

- n. This is true when we are by ourselves, but, as Paul hammers home, this is especially true when our testimonies have direct influence over the souls of men regarding their relationship with Jesus Christ. This is so true of young people and older people alike. We are called by God to carefully examine our motives, desires, and actions and align them with God's will and God's Word for maximum impact. Those people who are primarily motivated by the acceptance of men or what we call peer pressure or selfish narcissism have already lost their gospel power. The glory of Christ is the sun in the solar system of our lives; it is the relentless gravitational force that brings all our thoughts, motives, words, and actions into proper alignment, and it touches every aspect of our lives without exception.

2. Do Not Offend the Conscience Needlessly (vv. 32-11:1)

- a. Verse 32—When Paul says give no offense, he cannot mean not to offend anyone at any time for any reason because this is impossible! The people who offend no one are the people doing nothing of significance. Forward motion inevitably creates friction. In fact, living by such a rule is to constantly submit ourselves as a church to the endless negativity and criticism of the so-called offended. This is not what Paul means. He is once again referring to the offense of the conscience as it relates to the gospel.
- b. Nor is this, as it has been loudly, sadly, and wrongly decried, hypocrisy! A mature Christian has every right to explain his liberty yet determine not to exercise it for the sake of the gospel. Just because we have liberty in a certain area doesn't mean we have to push our liberty upon others. Here humility and love must win the battle with liberty. So what precisely is the meaning of Paul's statement? Gordon Fee: "To give offense...does not so much mean to hurt someone's feelings as to behave in such a way as to prevent someone else from hearing the gospel, or to alienate someone who is already a brother or sister."⁴⁷ Barrett: "Pleasing men is evil when it is done with a view to currying for with them, or so as to avoid persecution; it is good when it is done so as to lead them to the faith."⁴⁸
- c. Verse 32—When with Jews who do not know Christ or are new to the Christian faith, the mature Christian behaves in such a way so as not to compel the Jew to forsake faith in Jesus Christ alone and return either to Old Testament Judaism or some perversion of it. When with Greeks who

⁴⁷ Fee pg. 539

⁴⁸ Barrett pg. 245

do not know Christ or are new to the Christian faith, the mature Christian carefully considers his behavior for the same reasons! This humble consideration of personal liberty is most profound within the church, because the church is God's incubator for new spiritual life. Within the church, by design, are Jews and Greeks, not to mention many other nationalities, of all stages of spiritual maturity. Those who are strong, Paul says in Romans 15:1, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, rather than pleasing themselves. The church is a place of absolute selflessness and humble service for the good of others.

- d. Verses 33-11:1—Paul winds up this lengthy homily on liberty by giving his own example. He has done everything possible to win souls to Jesus—giving no offense unnecessarily, sacrificing his own liberty and comfort—but in all things, seeking the glory of God. Paul's example closely mimicked Christ's own behavior; thus, we are called to follow Christ and Paul as appropriate templates of godly, selfless behavior.

Conclusion: Fee: “Unfortunately, and despite this passage, the issue of personal freedom in matters that are *adiaphora* (spiritually neutral), as well as the limitation of freedom for the sake of others, continues to haunt many sectors of the church.”⁴⁹ This is unfortunately, and devastatingly, true! How often has the church said, “you may not eat,” when God has said, “you may freely eat!” This is the control of men in priority over the Word of God. What is biblical and right is to affirm that I may have liberty, and I do have liberty, but, in humility and grace, I will not exercise that liberty if it is a hindrance to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

⁴⁹ Fee pg. 541

Sermon 10

Title: Christian Liberty: Gospel Implications

Text: 1 Corinthians 8:1-6

Description: Today we would like to take a big-picture view of the biblical topic of Christian liberty. Paul has stated very clearly that the Christian does have liberty in a number of areas before the Lord (note: I will be giving several lists to write down in our study today). In 1 Corinthians 8-10, Paul states three areas of liberty in particular: 1) Eating or not eating food offered to idols (chs. 8 and 10); 2) Getting married or remaining single (ch. 9); and 3) As a preacher of the gospel, being fully supported from gospel ministry, or working a secular job instead (ch. 9).

To this list, we could add what the Scriptures add elsewhere: 4) Eating clean or unclean food (Acts 10:9-16), 5) Circumcision or non-circumcision for men (Gal. 5:1-3), and 6) Observation of holy days and Jewish feasts (Col. 2:16-17). These last three areas are specifically in contrast to the teaching of the Old Testament and deliberately so. There may be other areas liberty which the Bible states specifically, but these are the areas to come to my attention during this study.

It would not be accurate to limit Christian liberty merely to these six areas stated in the Scriptures. These six areas do have implications for other areas of life, to which the Scriptures may not speak, and this principle is actually taught in the texts we will consider on Christian liberty.

In order to understand the issue of Christian liberty, we must understand the four great purposes of the Christian: 1) Loving God with all your heart, 2) Glorifying God in all you do, 3) Obeying God in all He said, and 4) Advancing the gospel with all your might. A Christian's appropriate use of his liberty must not conflict with these four purposes.

Big Idea: Christian liberty is God's gracious gift to His children.

1. Christian liberty is all about the gospel

- a. Because we have spent many weeks working through this text exegetically (nine sermons over these three chapters), this passage will form the textual and theological basis of our study. On this basis, our task is to synthesize the whole of Scriptures on this topic into a cohesive, nuanced doctrine.
- b. Let us begin by reviewing some of the truths we have learned from the text of 1 Corinthians 8-10. There are, without question, areas of legitimate

Christian liberty, or areas where the Christian has freedom to behave as he chooses. Paul uses the word liberty (*exousia*) numerous times in these texts, specifically 8:9, 9:4 (same Greek word here translated as “right”) and verses 5, 6, and 12. This Greek word means “authority, right, privilege, ability, liberty.” It indicates a legal right or authority to do something or, as stated, freedom to make a personal decision. In other words, in many areas of life, God has delegated the right to engage in certain behaviors to us and to our conscience; this is a mark of spiritual growth and maturity.

- c. In chapters 8-10, there are three specific areas of liberty: 1) Eating food offered to idols (8:9, 9:4), 2) Marriage (9:5), and 3) Not working a secular job as a preacher (9:6ff). These liberties may not be fairly questioned, but, using these areas of liberty as his template, Paul teaches five principles that govern the exercise of legitimate liberty.
 - i. First, legitimate liberties must be sacrificed if they hinder the faith of a weak, immature brother in Christ (8:9-13). Paul defines the weaker brother as someone in the church who is considering making a commitment of faith to Jesus Christ but has not finalized his commitment. He is weak and impressionable by your choices. This in no way diminishes the liberty itself. The liberty and the free exercise thereof is no sin, but, if the liberty is exercised by the mature brother, Paul says it must be exercised in a fashion so as not to hinder the faith of another. This implies that different social settings have different implications for the exercise of liberty, because private settings have a different sort of gospel effect than public settings. Paul actually makes this statement explicitly in chapter 10.
 - ii. Second, along the same line, legitimate liberties must be sacrificed if they hinder the faith of prospective Christians: people outside the church who have not yet made a profession of faith but are thinking about it and are carefully watching your lifestyle to see how the gospel has affected you (9:16-23, 10:27-29).
 - iii. Third, legitimate liberties must never bring the Christian into bondage (9:24-27). This assumes that some areas of legitimate liberty could potentially bring bondage. Paul does not forbid these areas of liberty but instructs us to exercise self-control. Elsewhere, Paul points out easy and clear areas of application. Just because some people struggle with gluttony, (poor and debilitating eating habits), or are even slaves to certain kinds of food doesn't mean that food is evil and must never be enjoyed!

- iv. This also applies to what we drink. Let me give a clear example. I have several friends, quite a few actually, who have had nothing less than an addiction to Mountain Dew. That is, they couldn't make it through the day without it and would drink six to eight cans of Mountain Dew a day. This went on for years! If they didn't have their fix, they would get extremely intense cravings or even become shaky! Some people in the South have this same issue with Dr Pepper! I have heard of children who have this fixation on McDonald's chicken nuggets! None of these foods are inherently evil (you may disagree), but there is a lack of self-control here.
- v. Another area of application would be electronics. The smartphone, in particular, is designed to be addictive and deliberately causes the user to look at it over and over again by providing content and design specifically tailored to the user. This is how Apple and Samsung make money! They create a need that keeps the consumer coming back. Smartphones themselves are not evil, but this sort of usage indicates an un-Christian lack of control. This has been a huge discussion with my kids, who are vulnerable and not ready for those sorts of freedoms just yet. Legitimate liberties, Paul says, must never lead to bondage, and, if someone finds himself in bondage, that liberty needs to go!
- vi. Fourth, the exercise of legitimate liberty often leads to criticism by some in the church, but this ought not be the case (9:1-6, 10:30). Mature Christians should understand that other mature Christians have liberties and should never use their liberty as occasion to either puff themselves up or tear others down. Where the Bible is not crystal clear, we do not have the right to rush to judgment.
- vii. Finally, the Christian needs to be aware of his own fleshly tendency to return to idolatry. An abuse of Christian liberty could very possibly lead the professing Christian to deny the Lord and return to idolatry (10:1-14), so the wise Christian will gladly exercise liberty in a fashion that does not cause him to question nor doubt his faith or relationship with God.

2. Christian liberty is all about grace

- a. What have we learned? We see three clear take-away principles from this text.
 - i. In the matter of Christian liberty, the two great concerns are the glory of God and the advance of the Gospel. Where the gospel and glory of God are hindered, liberty must be gladly sacrificed.

- ii. There is a major consideration of maturity in the exercise of liberty. Those who are older and more spiritually mature naturally possess more liberty, because their faith is more deeply grounded in Jesus Christ.
- iii. The exercise of Christian liberty must be sincerely considered for its impact on new Christians who are weak in faith, rather than its effect on mature Christians. This is a mark of grace in every way.

Conclusion: Why is this such an incredibly central principle for our church, and, indeed, for the entire New Testament? For this reason: Christian liberty is all about the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the gospel reshapes everything about how we view God, life, and eternity.

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ABSTRACT

TEACHING CHRISTIAN LIBERTY AS IT RELATES TO GOSPEL OUTREACH TO INDIAN HINDUS AT LEGACY CHURCH, NOVI, MICHIGAN

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023
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This project is intended to increase the understanding of Christian liberty among members of Legacy Church in Novi, MI in order to more effectively communicate the gospel to Indian Hindus in our community. Chapter 1 explains the spiritual transformation of the author as a result of a careful exposition of the principles of Christian liberty as explained in 1 Corinthians 8-10, and details his ministry transition to Legacy Church of Novi, Michigan. It furthermore provides the history and ministry context of Legacy Church, and the goals of this project. Chapter 2 provides a theological exposition of the principles of Christian liberty as presented by Paul in 1 Corinthians 8-10. These principles govern the values of Christians concerning behaviors in which they voluntarily engage or abstain for the sake of the gospel. Chapter 3 examines the nature of Indian Hinduism, particularly as it relates to Indian Hindus living in Novi, Michigan. The study of Hinduism will find its intersection with the principles of Christian liberty and gospel outreach as presented by Paul in 1 Corinthians 8-10. Chapter 4 describes the project itself, with particular attention to the content and efficacy of the sermon series regarding Christian liberty. Chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project based on completion of specified goals. Ultimately, this project seeks to equip Christians with a tangible gospel outreach strategy, particularly targeting those people groups with a background of idolatry.

VITA

Benjamin Ernst Klaus

EDUCATION

BBS, Ambassador Baptist College, 2003

MA, Maranatha Baptist Seminary, 2011

MDiv, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Assistant Pastor for Youth, Bethel Baptist Church, Schaumburg, Illinois 2007-2008

Assistant Pastor for Music and Youth, Red Rocks Baptist Church, Morrison, Colorado, 2008-2012

Lead Pastor, Gibraltar Bible Baptist Church, Gibraltar, Michigan, 2013-2020

Lead Pastor, Legacy Church, Novi, Michigan, 2020-