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1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1, ESV.

*³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. ³² Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, ³³ just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. **11** Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.*

A fulltime job.

This is the beginning of Chapter 9 of 1 Corinthians, from the New Living Translation:

Am I not as free as anyone else? Am I not an apostle? Haven't I seen Jesus our Lord with my own eyes? Isn't it because of my work that you belong to the Lord? ² Even if others think I am not an apostle, I certainly am to you. You yourselves are proof that I am the Lord's apostle.

Paul is writing this letter to the believers in Corinth; he founded this church himself.

Paul is defending himself here. It's believed that there were people who followed

Paul from city to city, trying to undermine his religious authority, and so he is trying

to compensate for incorrect things that others have said about him, people denying

his spiritual authority. He is making it clear that he knows the teachings of Christ.

He is making two points. First, he is serving as an Apostle freely, without anyone

forcing him. Second, he has evidence that he is an Apostle: he saw Jesus on the

road to Damascus, implying that this means that Jesus personally appointed him an

Apostle. And the mere that he has led the people of Corinth to Jesus' teachings is

more evidence that he is an Apostle. We need to remember something here. Superficially, it may seem that Paul is claiming to be something he is not, and that he is one of the twelve who walked the Earth with Jesus. But Paul never knew Jesus while Jesus was alive. However, the word Apostle is a translation of the Greek word “*Apóstolos*”, and it means “messenger”. Paul is using the word in this fashion, and so this is a bit of a more modest statement, and certainly a true one. The word “*Apóstolos*” can also be used to refer to a diplomat, someone who is delivering a message for an important person; in this sense, too, Paul is indeed an Apostle. Paul admits in this quote that there are those who do not feel that he is a proper Apostle, but he declares that to the believers of Corinth, he is *their* Apostle. To summarize, Paul is telling us just what an Apostle is: a representative of Jesus Christ, one who brings the Word of Christ to others, and importantly, one who does this freely.

Paul goes on to tell us how much he is willing to compromise on his own needs and preferences, even on his own self-identity, to serve as an Apostle:

¹⁹ For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. ²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. ²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. ²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

Paul is so committed to being a representative of Jesus, a messenger of the Word, that he will be chameleon. He can become anything, even a weak person, if that is what is needed to reach people. He makes it clear that being an Apostle is not about making things about yourself: it's about sharing the Gospel with anyone and everyone. He also says that being an Apostle means being a servant.

Paul then says that being an Apostle is like competing as a champion athlete. The goal is to win:

²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. ²⁵ Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶ So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. ²⁷ But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

The people of Corinth was very familiar with the games held at Olympia, as this city was less than a hundred miles west of Corinth. The games included wrestling, boxing, running, horse racing, chariot racing, throwing the discus, and throwing the javelin. So, these believers could deeply appreciate his metaphor of the Apostle as a runner. You must use self-control, run hard for the great prize of converting others to the faith. He is telling the readers to not simply be passive acceptors of the Word, but to become athletes themselves - to become Apostles.

The believers in Corinth were mostly Gentiles, not Jews, and so Paul teaches them about Israelite and Jewish history. I have edited this heavily:

10 For I do not want you to be unaware, that our fathers were all baptized into Moses and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased for they were overthrown in the wilderness. ⁶ Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. ⁷ Do not be idolaters as some of them were. ⁹ We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, ¹⁰ nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

He tells them that the People of God varied in their trust in God, in how willing they were to follow the laws of God. God led them through the wilderness of the desert - and God will lead the people of Corinth and all believers through the wilderness of life. But you must be careful to not be tempted by evil, by the things of this world. Paul mentions idolatry specifically. This is probably because there was a problem with the Corinthian church having members who claimed to follow Jesus but who also worshiped human-made idols of wood and metal. He tells these Gentiles that this history from the Hebrew Scriptures serves as a deliberate lesson for them, so that they are not destroyed by the temptation of the serpent of Satan, by the great Destroyer. He reminds them that what they are experiencing, though, is natural. All people who try to come to truly know God through Christ will be faced with the same temptations. Importantly, God will make sure that whatever temptations they face are no stronger than they are able to endure.

Paul then presents some words of wisdom that would be worthy of the Book of Proverbs: ²³ *“All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up.* ²⁴ *Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.* This would be great advice for people in our permissive, anything-goes society today. It may be true that all things are lawful, but that doesn't mean they are helpful to the spirit, to our faith. It doesn't mean that they will build us up, rather than break us down. Paul tells the Corinthian believers to seek the good of the person next to you, of your neighbor, rather than of yourself. An Apostle is not selfish. An Apostle thinks of the spiritual and physical well-being of others.

He then gets back to this issue of idolatry:

²⁵ *Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience.* ²⁶ *For “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof.”* ²⁷ *If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience.* ²⁸ *But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—* ²⁹ *I do not mean your conscience, but his.*

He tells these mostly Gentile believers that they do not have to worry about the food laws of the Jews. He says that they can eat any meat that is sold or offered to them. It's better to go to someone's home and join them for dinner, rather than refuse to go because you are afraid that the meat might not meet the food laws. It's important to take advantage of the opportunity to communicate with

people, to be a messenger, to be a representative of Christ, to be an Apostle.

However, if the meat was offered to idols in sacrifice, then they should not eat it.

The reason isn't because there is anything wrong with this. The reason is to make it clear to the person who is offering the food that it is not right to worship idols.

They should refuse the meat, not for their souls, but for the souls of others.

The story we are looking at here covers Chapters 9 and 10 of 1 Corinthians. Here is the ending of Chapter 10. Note that I have included the first verse of Chapter 11. The problem is that from the thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries, long after this letter of Paul was written, the Chapter and Verse numbers were added to the Bible - and they simply made a lot of mistakes. 1 Corinthians 11:1 should have been the end of Chapter 10.

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This is the bottom line for Paul. Whatever these believers do, whatever they eat or drink, they should do it all for the glory of God. They should alienate no one, so that the Word can reach everyone. They are not to shun people who do things they do not do or believe things they do not believe – because doing this is bound to keep these other people from hearing the Word of God. Apostles should not seek

their own advantage, but the advantage of others. And when they serve as Apostles, as messengers, as representatives – they should imitate Christ.

We must live for the glory of God every day of our lives. We want all people to be saved, to hear the Word, to learn the two great commandments of Jesus Christ, the ones that he says supersede the Great Ten Commandments: 1 to love God with all our hearts and minds, and 2 to love our neighbor as ourselves. We are to accept God's grace and pass that grace on to others. We are all to be Apostles.

Here is an interesting take on the Gospel, on the New Testament, on the New Covenant, on the life of Jesus the Christ, on the Messiah: Jesus came to earth not directly to save us; rather, his immediate concern was simply to glorify God. The way that he chose to glorify God was by saving us. Saving us was just a side-effect of glorifying God. We can glorify God in precisely the same way – by bringing the Word to others. We deliver the Word through our voices and our actions.

I met a chaplain at one point who didn't seem to truly act like a chaplain. This person was judgmental and didn't like to visit certain kinds of patients or family members. If someone didn't have the values that this chaplain had, he would complain about the person, and I often wondered if this chaplain did more harm than good by leaving someone feeling rejected, rather than embraced and supported during a crisis. This guy was a phony chaplain, in my opinion. I once

ordered a boom arm for a microphone I use at home. When the arm came, I set it up, hooking the microphone to the end of it, and clamping the arm to my desk. There is an elbow-like joint in such a boom; this allows the mic to be moved up and down. But after I put the boom and mic together, and clamped it to my desk, the mic dropped to my desk. The elbow of the boom didn't provide enough resistance to hold up even a lightweight microphone. It was a phony boom. Paul, in Chapters 9 and 10 of 1 Corinthians, tells the people of Corinth that he is an Apostle. He tells them what a real Apostle is. He tells them that they should act as Apostles, too. He tells them how not to be a phony chaplain, a phony boom, a phony Apostle. In our world today we are used to lots of phony, hypocritical people and phony, fraudulent goods. We don't want to be like that. We want to go out into the world as genuine Apostles. The most important part of this is to make sure we are doing it for the glory of God, not for the glory of ourselves. We don't make people become exactly like us. We don't demand that they meet us in our space. We meet them in their space. We make them feel welcomed, uplifted, like they, too, could go out there and be Apostles. We share the Word.

But there is more. In Luke, Chapter 5, the author tells us this about the Apostles after Jesus called them to serve: *"they left everything and followed him"*. We don't have to leave everything behind like the twelve did, like Paul did. We

don't have to go on the road and become homeless. But this phrase tells us something else: it is a fulltime job to be an Apostle. If we want to be a representative of Christ, if we want to be the messenger who delivers the Word to others, if we want to be an Apostle to others, it is indeed a fulltime job, at least in this sense: we can never NOT be an Apostle. We can never take time off and be a phony and live in a hypocritical way. It takes constant focus, both on our own spiritual learning and on our interface with other people, to be an Apostle.

It is an incredible opportunity, a true gift, to be able to be an Apostle. This isn't a new idea, something I dreamt up. We read in the New Testament about people who picked up the mantle of the Apostles, people like Barnabas, Apollos, Epaphroditus, Phoebe, and many others, were not named as official members of the twelve, but who dedicated their lives to always living as people of faith and as Apostles – for their own sake and for the sake of others. We can be like the many unheralded Apostles in the Bible by serving as representatives of Christ and messengers carrying the Word of God. Please pray briefly with me.

God, let us be representatives of Christ, messengers of the Word, modern Apostles. Let us through our faith, our actions, our words, and our prayer lead others to God. May we help others love you, love their neighbors as themselves, and then present their faith to yet more prospective believers. Amen.