

“The ‘Balanced’ Christian”
1 Corinthians 10:31

I love the Olympics and I have been amazed by them over the past few weeks. I think the most amazing performance I saw was by U.S. swimmer Michael Phelps. He has become the most highly decorated Olympian in the history of the modern Olympics—winning a record eight gold medals in a single Olympics (bringing his total number of Olympic Gold medals to 14). He set seven world records during these Olympics, and he isn’t done yet. He’s only 23 years old. He plans on competing at the 2012 Olympics in London, where he will most likely add to his hefty sack of gold medals.

The reporters were busy following Michael Phelps in his preparation for this Olympics. Reporting on Michael Phelps’ diet, the New York Post printed that he eats in one day:

Breakfast:

Three fried-egg sandwiches loaded with cheese, lettuce, tomatoes, fried onions, and mayonnaise

Two cups of coffee, 1 five-egg omelet, 1 bowl of grits

Three slices of French toast topped with powdered sugar

Three chocolate-chip pancakes

Lunch:

1 pound of enriched pasta

Two large ham and cheese sandwiches slathered with mayo on white bread

1,000 calories worth of energy drinks

Dinner:

Another pound of pasta, an entire pizza, 1,000 calories worth of energy drinks

What I find interesting about this is the time it takes. Not just the eating, which must take a lot of time, but the training overall. And in fact, in preparation for this Olympics, he has only had time to focus on three things: Eat...swim...sleep. That’s it. Now, when I think about his routine compared to most people I know, one word comes to mind - “unbalanced.”

I bet you can relate to spending your efforts in one area of life while ignoring other areas. It seems to be all around us that people say they need more balance in their lives or that they are out of balance, that they have a routine to maintain balance, because balance is good...right? However, as we take a look at today’s text we find a clear description of what the Christian life is. And it is not balanced.

The issue here isn’t about activities. The issue Paul addresses is this: what is the goal in anything and everything I do? It’s not a matter of finding the right routine or formula for a balanced life, but rather in all things, do all to the glory of God. It’s not balance at all. It’s total devotion. It is not religion detached from other activities. It is nothing less than the foundation upon which every activity in life rests. It is unreserved and all encompassing worship of God. It is the opposite of what we could call “balance.”

That’s what Paul is calling for in this part of his first letter to the Corinthians.

About a year ago Pastor Tommy preached on 1 Corinthians. So, let me refresh your memory about the Corinthian church. 1 Corinthians is Paul’s first letter to the Christians in Corinth. Paul thanks God for the church in Corinth. The testimony about Christ is confirmed among them. But this first letter was not written to commend or praise the church in Corinth. Rather, Paul had a specific message he wanted to communicate to them. In fact, anyone who has seen the TV show “LOST” can relate to this.

For those who don’t know, “LOST” is a show about a group of people who are on a flight from Sydney, Australia, to Los Angeles when their plane crashes onto a mysterious island. One of the survivors is Mr. Eko. Mr. Eko is a very large, strong man with a violent past in his African homeland. At some point in the show Mr. Eko finds a large branch and carves scripture verses into it. Mr. Eko finds during the show that his “Jesus stick,” as another character calls it, is quite useful in protecting and defending himself from his enemies.

Now in Paul’s case with the Corinthians, he is administering a spanking with his own “Jesus stick” which isn’t really a stick—it’s this letter. In spite of considering them Christians (people who call upon the name of the Lord), Paul cannot address the church in Corinth as spiritual people. He says they are still of the flesh. They have significant issues in their church, and Paul is writing to address them. In fact, Paul goes through the first ten chapters where he tells them to:

1. Have no divisions among you.
2. Be united in the same mind and same judgment.
3. Be imitators of Paul.
4. Do not associate with the sexually immoral, the greedy, the idolatrous, revilers, drunkards, or swindlers within the church.
5. Flee sexual immorality.
6. Run that you may obtain the prize.
7. Do not grumble.
8. Flee idolatry.
9. Do not eat food offered to idols.
10. And the rest...

And then comes to the end of this section by writing, ***“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”***

A casual reading of this text can certainly lead to a view that Paul is ultimately concerned with the **actions** of the church. He spends a lot of effort writing do’s and don’ts to the church. However, if you look closely at today’s text, we see that command given to the church, to do all to the glory of God. Paul dives down to the root of Christianity and provides an anchor for all other actions in the life of a Christian.

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

The first task we have before us today is to understand what Paul means by this verse. Specifically, what does he mean by “do all to the glory of God”? This is the key. How do we glorify something?

To be clear, when I say “glorify,” I don’t mean that our behavior we makes God out to be more glorious than he really is. That’s blasphemy. God is the all-glorious one. His glory is not dependent on **our view** of his glory.

Everybody can understand this. It’s really simple. Every person both **knows how** to glorify something and **actually does** glorify something just about every day, either intentionally or not. The world is filled with examples. Have you ever been watching a sport and seen an amazing shot and cheered and gone nuts about it? That is glorifying it. Have you ever seen a sunset so beautiful you had to tell someone about it? That’s glorifying it. When you hear a new song and tell a friend, “You have GOT to hear this!” that glorifies the song. We glorify things by enjoying them so deeply that we seek to draw other people into it, because we know they will enjoy it, too. To glorify God means to enjoy him above all other things. Enjoying God in this way involves loving him, obeying him, trusting him, desiring him, and seeking to draw others to enjoy him as well.

We’re going to look at three points that flow out of this verse today:

1. Discard your freedoms to the glory of God.
2. Develop discernment to the glory of God.
3. Delight in Jesus to the glory of God.

1. Discard your freedoms to the glory of God.

a. What freedoms?

In the historical setting of this letter, the freedoms Paul is addressing are centered on eating food sacrificed to idols. The question is asked, “Should we eat meat either bought in the market or served at a private meal when we are told it comes from animals sacrificed to idols?” Paul’s response is that, while Christians are free to eat whatever is sold in the market or offered at a private meal, if the conscience of their friend who invited them to dinner is challenged, then do not eat, for the sake of their friend whose conscience is challenged. Discard your freedom to eat what is provided, for the benefit of another.

b. How do we discard them?

Ultimately the only way you can discard your freedoms is by holding them so loosely that they fall from your hand as you reach out to love your neighbor. This is the second half of what Jesus commands in teaching the greatest commandment in Mark 12:30-31, ***“And you shall Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength...And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”***

The question that should come to your mind is, “How do I hold these things loosely? The answer is the same as our third point for today: delight in Jesus above all. To the extent that you delight in Jesus, and draw your satisfaction from him, you will not realize that you have already discarded your freedoms.

Tommy preached about the danger we face here last week. His third point was to not let anyone fool us. Jesus + Anything = Nothing. Examine yourself: how tightly do you hold onto your freedoms. Are you clinging to them as you try to hold onto Jesus as well?

c. How does this glorify God?

When we put off our freedoms in favor of the spiritual well being of another, we demonstrate the value of God’s command to love others (to seek their advantage *that they may be saved*, God is glorified. I need to point out something here. In the section just before this, Paul is not referring to behavior seen by believers but by unbelievers. You should be alarmed at this. Paul is telling the Corinthian Christians that they should modify their behavior to suit the consciences of their pagan friends. It is a testimony that glorifies God that you desire the spiritual well being of another above your right to a personal freedom. When you give up a right or personal freedom and focus on the salvation of the unsaved friend, God is glorified.

d. Exhortation.

We are to eat and drink and do all to the glory of God. We glorify God when we love Him, obey him, trust him, desire him, enjoy him above all other things. This behavior gives evidence of the value of God. When we put our desires aside in favor of the benefit of others, we glorify God. Yes, we have many freedoms, especially in this country. Yet, the freedoms we have that glorify God the most are the ones we give up for the benefit of another. Discard your freedoms to the glory of God.

2. Develop discernment to the glory of God.

a. What is discernment?

How do I know what things are and are not “to the glory of God”? They must be discerned. They must be accurately evaluated and comprehended. Discernment is not a feeling. It isn’t knowledge. It isn’t wisdom, but it’s close. The best definition I’ve found is from Spurgeon, who said, ***“Discernment is not a matter of simply telling the difference between right and wrong; rather, it is telling the difference between right and almost right.”***

b. How do I develop discernment?

The answer is by prayerfully reading and studying the Bible, and by the Holy Spirit working the truth into the fiber of your being. Prayerful reading and studying of the Bible will, by the power of the Holy Spirit, cause transformation. This is the result of the renewing of the mind spoken of by Paul in Romans 12:2, ***“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”***

Do you spend time reading, studying, and praying over God’s word?

c. How does this glorify God?

You don’t have to read very far into Psalms to find a good description of the man God blesses, the man that glorifies God. Psalm 1:1-2, ***“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.”***

d. Exhortation

Paul is expecting the Corinthians to evaluate all of the situations they find themselves in AND determine a way to glorify God in and through them. These people are NOT on autopilot. They are not asleep at the wheel. Paul has serious expectations for them and for us today as well. We are to be critically evaluating our situations and circumstances as we move through our days, to do all to the glory of God. We are to be people who know the difference between right and almost right. Develop discernment to the glory of God.

3. Delight in Jesus to the glory of God.

You may say, “The verse says do all to the glory of God,” not Jesus. And you are right. However, would you be shocked to hear someone say, “If you don’t glorify Jesus, you don’t glorify God”? John 5:23 states, “...**Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.**”

The way we glorify God is by glorifying Jesus. The way we glorify Jesus is by loving him, trusting him, desiring him, and enjoying him above all things.

a. How do I delight in Jesus?

Perhaps the meat sacrificed to idols situation doesn’t come up in your home too often. So Paul has everything covered in “whatever you do.” Paul intends here that we take all things into consideration in this manner. Use your imagination here to weave this into your life. Eat breakfast to the glory of God, drive to work to the glory of God, love your family to the glory of God, study algebra or English or history to the glory of God. Eat, swim, sleep to the glory of God. Win gold medals to the glory of God. The point is that there are no elements of life that aren’t to be done to the glory of God.

This last point is a little different in that we are commanded to do it, and it’s also the way we are able to achieve the first two points. From the John 5:23 verse, and the flow of thought of the Old and New Testaments, we are commanded to delight in Jesus. In addition, the only way for us to discard our freedoms and develop discernment is through delighting in Jesus above all things.

b. So what?

You may have listened to what I’ve said today and thought “Okay. So what? What do I do now? Do I get rid of all my freedoms, all the things I like? Do I enroll in seminary to become a discerning person?” Listen carefully...Jesus is the answer! Is there a way for you to work hard to become more like Jesus, to be better at doing all things to the glory of God – Yes! Look to the cross! Look unto Jesus! Pray that he would grant you a heart that longs to trust him in all of life’s sorrowful and wonderful circumstances and would enjoy him above all things. Delight in Jesus to the glory of God.

It is not possible to glorify God by our efforts. God is not glorified by us putting our noses to the grindstone to improve ourselves. What we need are new desires! We need new affections, we need new tastes. Nobody but Jesus can do that.

So, do you see the desperate problem we face? We are sinners, yet we are commanded to do all to the glory of God. We are commanded to do what we cannot do! That should make us tremble. It should make us run to Jesus where we ask him to have mercy on us and save us, to change our desires, to make us satisfied in him alone.

And he will. The hope of the gospel is that for those who confess their resistance to God, their all consuming self-absorption, their sin, that those who trust in Jesus as their Savior, trust in Him as their Lord, trust in Him as their treasure will be saved.

If you’re not a Christian, my prayer for you is that the Holy Spirit would open your eyes and soften your heart to see Jesus as worthy of your trust, worthy of your praise, worthy of following with every fiber of your being, worthy of forsaking all other enjoyments to follow, worthy to give your life to and give your life for, and that you would enjoy Him above all things. He is the only one who can satisfy the desires of your heart.

If you are a Christian, my prayer is the same. Because ultimately, it is only Jesus who **gives** life, and it is only through Jesus that appropriate desires can be produced in our lives, so that we “...do all to the glory of God.”