

2. The Church's Fruitful Partnership: Prioritise a Gospel Mindset

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[0 : 00] Come with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 10, page 958, and to these last few verses of the chapter. Well, last week we began a new thematic series about the how and the why of gospel mission.

And we're thinking in these studies particularly about the fruitful partnership that we as the Church of Jesus Christ have in that mission of the gospel.

And today I want to think about perhaps the very first thing of all, and that is prioritizing a gospel mindset. Last time we looked at the why of gospel mission, and we saw that the Bible's answer is very clear.

We have a mission as the Church because, as we saw in 1 Timothy 2 verse 5, because there is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

And this God, Paul tells us, desires that all people should come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved. That's why we have a mission. If we ask, how is God going to do that?

[1 : 24] How is God purposed to bring people to a knowledge of the truth? The answer is, through us, through his Church. There is one Church.

And therefore we are all called to a fruitful partnership in this gospel mission. That's the Great Commission. Remember, we ended last week looking at that. Jesus says, all authority in heaven and on earth is given to me, therefore you go and make disciples of all nations.

And that command, you, is plural. It's given to the whole Church together. Not just a collection of individuals, but to the whole body of the Church. We all have a part to play.

Obviously, that specific command was given then to the eleven, to the apostles of Jesus. But of course, these same apostles passed on the baton to the whole Church, very clearly.

And that's what it means to be part of the Church, to belong to a fellowship. That word fellowship that we use is the Greek word *koinonia*. It's the word that means partnership.

[2 : 33] A business partnership means that all the partners share in the profits of the business. It also means that they all share in the work of the business.

Don't get one without the other. And that's what we are. A partnership. Now, of course, the Church of Jesus Christ is a diverse body. And that metaphor of the body is one that the New Testament uses a lot.

We're not all the same. Not every one of us has the same role. But we are all connected and we all do have some role. And indeed, there are some things, of course, that every one of us is called to without exception, if the Church is truly to be a Church in mission.

As we begin to ask that question, how? How is gospel mission going to happen through the Church? Then the first answer must be that gospel mission will never, ever happen unless Christian believers, unless the whole Christian Church prioritizes a gospel mindset.

That is, that we determine together to see all of our life and indeed to live all of our lives to serve Christ and his gospel.

[3 : 55] And that means, like the Lord Jesus himself, not looking to ourselves, not looking to our needs and our wants, but living to love and to serve Christ in absolutely everything that we do.

Living so that all that we do and all that we are is for the cause of Jesus Christ. That is what it means to prioritize a gospel mindset.

Now, there's many, many places in the New Testament that we could look to teaching about that. We could look to the whole letter of Paul to the Philippians, where he says so much about partnership in that gospel ministry, the verse we began with.

Above all, he says, Let your manner of life, that is your corporate life, be worthy of the gospel of Christ. Standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. You see? Prioritize a gospel mindset and let that unite you, let that build you together in everything that you do.

[5 : 04] And he goes on, of course, doesn't he, in chapter 2 of Philippians, to show that that is to live out the mindset of Christ. Don't look out for your own interests, he said, but those of others.

Have this mindset, the mind of Christ, who though being in the very form, nature of God, made himself nothing, taking upon himself the form of a servant, and death even on a cross.

That's your mindset, said Paul. The gospel mindset that will give everything to save sinners and to glorify God. Well, we're going to come to Philippians a bit later on in this series.

So today I want to look just at these few verses at the end of 1 Corinthians chapter 10, where there's a very concise summary of what I'm calling the principle and the practice, and indeed the pattern for lives that prioritize the gospel mindset.

So let's just read these few verses again. Verse 31 onwards. So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, says Paul, do all to the glory of God.

[6 : 15] Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, 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.

Be imitators of me as I am of Christ. Well, there's the principle for how to prioritize a gospel mindset. Verse 31. Do all to the glory of God. Very simple, isn't it? And yet it's utterly comprehensive at the same time.

Consider the whole of your life, says Paul, all that you do, all from your food and drink, to your home life, to your work life, to your leisure, to your holidays, to your friendships, absolutely everything. Not least, of course, how you exercise and think about your corporate life as the church. Do everything to the glory of God. That's a real gospel mindset.

[7 : 22] It's just logical, isn't it? If the glory of God is to be proclaimed and acknowledged in the whole world, then that message must not just be spoken, but obviously it's got to be lived out.

It's got to be a whole way of life. There's got to be a missionary lifestyle. And of course, that always begins, doesn't it, with a missionary mindset. I wonder how much you've, you've ever thought about that.

Did you think about that when you got out of bed this morning? Did you think, I must get out of bed to the glory of God? I have to confess, actually, I did think that this morning because I had to get up extra early because we had an extra early service this morning.

So I had to think, this is for the glory of God as I rub my sleep out of my eyes. But every day, as you get out of bed, as you put your clothes on, as you eat your breakfast, do you think, how can I do this to the glory of God?

As you travel to work, as you do your morning's work in the office, as you sit in the staff room and have your coffee, as you treat your customers that come into your business, if you have a business like that.

[8 : 28] Everything you do, do you think to yourself, how can I do this to the glory of God? Do all, says Paul, to the glory of God. That's the principle of a real gospel mindset.

Now we could begin to discuss for hours, couldn't we, how you could do each one of these things to the glory of God. I once was at a meeting where John Piper was speaking on this theme of glorifying God in everything.

And he challenged somebody to say, just name anything and I'll tell you how you can do it to the glory of God. So somebody said, right, tell me how to drink orange juice to the glory of God. We had about a 15 minute sermon on 100 million different ways of how you can glorify God as you drink orange juice.

Come and ask me afterwards if you want to know what he said. But you see, Paul, Paul is actively going behind every action that we undertake to the vital attitude that underlies every one of our actions.

And it's that attitude that will determine whether what we do is going to be to the glory of God or not. And it's when we see that, it's when we actually see the context in which Paul is speaking here that we'll begin to understand better what it actually means in practice to do all for the glory of God.

[9 : 47] This is just another way of saying what Paul said to the Philippians. Whatever happens, let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. Do all to the glory of God. So let's look at verses 32 and 33 where Paul fleshes out that principle of verse 31 by pointing the Corinthian church to his own practice.

The practice of that principle is seen says Paul in imitating my attitude in everything that I do. What is that? Well, verse 32. Negatively, it is giving no offense whether to Jewish or Greek outsiders to the church or wherever possible to insiders in the church.

Giving no offense. And positively, verse 33, it's seeking to please everyone. Not seeking his own advantage but that of many so they may be saved.

That's how you practice the principle of doing all for the glory of God. You see what he's saying?

You live not for your own satisfaction but you live in everything for other people's salvation.

salvation. And that means often making a very great deal of personal sacrifice. If you read the context of these verses what Paul's speaking about here in 1 Corinthians 8-10 you'll see that it's all about this controversial issue of whether Christians should or could even eat meat that's been offered to idols.

[11 : 24] That sounds a very odd thing to us to be discussing for nearly three chapters in the Bible but of course in that very pagan culture in ancient Greece and Corinth and in fact it's still true in some eastern cultures today most meat had been dedicated to some idol or other some spirit in one of the temples before it had been sold in the shops that surround the temple or before it had been served in the many restaurants that surrounded all these pagan temples in the center of the city.

and some Christians of course especially those from a Jewish background not exclusively but particularly they were horrified naturally at the very thought of tainting themselves with eating things that had been dedicated to false idols.

The Old Testament so strong against idolatry and the Jews were so determined to separate themselves from that it would be a horrifying thing for any Christian Jew to think of eating these things.

And yet on the other hand there were plenty of other Christians both Jews and Gentiles including Paul himself who had no difficulty with that because they knew that idols were nothing and that anything as Jesus said anything going into the body isn't what taints you but of course it's what comes out of the heart that actually makes you unclean.

Now we've got no time to go into the whole complicated debate but Paul's point is this look the key thing in all of this is not actually me and my conscience not my feeling of keeping myself clean.

[13 : 07] When you've got a gospel mindset says Paul even if you believe something is perfectly legitimate in itself the real issue for you will be this is my doing this or eating this going to help the gospel or is it going to hinder it?

And Paul says anything whatever it is anything that hinders the gospel it gives offense and that word literally means to put a stumbling block in front of somebody that is to put a stumbling block in their path to salvation anything that should do that that should cause somebody to find it difficult to find their way to salvation in Jesus Christ anything like that I must avoid in order that I will do nothing ever to hinder somebody else's salvation I'll give up all my rights if necessary says Paul I'll give up all my personal satisfaction in order that many may be saved and that's that's what it means to be prioritizing a gospel mindset in your life so any Jews that he's trying to evangelize in Corinth might of course think it absolutely scandalous if Paul said to them look

I want to explain the gospel to you so I'll meet you next Thursday outside the temple and we'll pop in next door to the pagan pizza hut and we'll have a meal together and I'll explain the gospel to you now even though Paul has come to have a particular favorite in that pagan pepperoni pizza at the temple of Zeus cafe he's not going to do that no what he'll do is he'll say look I'll I'll meet you for a vegetarian falafel in the synagogue cafe and let me explain to you the truth about Jesus the Messiah on the other hand if he's if he's talking to some pagans that he's got to know in Corinth he'll understand that they think these religious Jews and in fact they also think these Christians are rather a strange sect who keep themselves to themselves and have all sorts of funny practices he's not going to go to that pagan idol worshipper in Corinth and say look come along to our synagogue and I'll give you some funny robes to put on and you can come and join in and do these funny things with us and eat the funny food that we eat and look I'll tell you about Jesus no he's going to say look

I'll meet you for that pagan pepperoni pizza and we'll have a nice glass of wine together and I'd love to explain to you about the message of Jesus Christ he's not demanding his right to live for himself but he's making sacrifices to live for other people's salvation just look back to chapter 9 verse 19 to that passage we read and he explains it very carefully there doesn't he though I'm free from all I've made myself a servant to all that I might win more of them to the Jew 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 to those outside the law I became as one outside the law not being outside of the law of God but under the law of Christ myself that is that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I might share with them its blessings.

All for the sake of the gospel in order to share its blessings. That's prioritizing a gospel mindset. Seeking to do everything for the glory of God.

[17:03] Now friends, if we are going to be fruitful partners together in Christ's mission, then we also need to be like that too, don't we? We need in our own lives, in our church life, to follow Paul in that self-effacing sacrificial commitment to be servants to all for Christ's sake.

And that means both sensitivity to the way that others think and feel, to the outsider, to non-Christians, and also sacrifice sometimes of the things that we like. And the way we like to do things.

Just so that others can come to know Christ and be built up in him. So for example, today there are in our churches in this country still some folk who are a bit like first century Jews that Paul had to evangelize. They're religious people.

They've been brought up all their lives in the church, but they may never actually have heard the true gospel explained to them and proclaimed. Now there's a lot fewer of those folks nowadays. Most folk of younger generations don't have any church connection at all, but there is still an older generation. There are still people like that in the parish churches of our country. Now suppose a young minister is called to a congregation like that.

[18:22] somebody who knows the evangelical faith, and it's the very first time somebody like that's gone to a church to that particular place. And he might, in his own mind and heart, absolutely abhor the way that they do almost everything in that church.

He might hate their traditional ways. He can't stand their choir. He can't stand having to wear a dog collar, or put on robes and sweat like a pig in the pulpit under the lights.

He might absolutely hate all the formality and all the pageantry and all sorts of things that go on. But he knows if he's really serving the gospel, that what those people need about everything else is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

They need the truth that's going to lead them to salvation. So instead of going into that church and saying, oh, what you need is total modernization. Get rid of this. Chuck out the organs.

Sack the choir. Get rid of the robes. Rip off your dog collar. Change everything. Sing all kinds of songs you've never heard and you can't stand. He's not going to do that. He's going to put up with all these things that he hates.

[19:35] He's even going to put on those robes and sweat. So that he will not offend them needlessly. So that he won't put a stumbling block in their path.

And so that they will listen when he preaches the Lord Jesus Christ to them. When he proclaims to them the need to be born again, to come to know Jesus. For him, you see, that is prioritizing a gospel mindset.

And in time, as people begin to understand the gospel, as they begin to understand the things that really matter about the worship of God, then many of all these things that are not really gospel matters at all, they'll gradually begin to fade away.

People won't think about them anymore. Of course, some people will be offended. Some people will be very angry. But, it will be the offense of the cross and the gospel message.

It won't be needless offense. It won't be unnecessary offense. I'm very, very glad that I don't have to wear robes and dog collars and all these sorts of things.

[20:42] But there are times when I'm willing to do it. At a wedding, or at a funeral, or at a particular place. If people say to me, look, we've got non-Christian family and friends and they want to see the minister wearing this sort of thing, I'll do that.

If they're going to listen to me, then proclaim the gospel of Jesus. I'm willing to sweat for that. It's just having a gospel mindset. Of course, much more often today, actually, it's the total pagan outsiders that we need to be thinking about.

Not people who've always grown up in the church. It's about how to win them. How to reach them. Not how to think about those who have always known traditions.

And that means that many of our churches also need to pay much more heed, don't they, to Paul's practice to give up a lot of our cherished traditions for the sake of saving others. Somebody told me not long ago that somebody knew had come into their church for the first time and they sat down beside a regular and the person had turned to them to speak to them.

They thought they were going to say hello and welcome. What in fact they said was, you can't sit there, that's Mrs. Jones' seat. It's very easy, isn't it, to make our churches terribly inaccessible.

[21 : 58] To make them a stumbling block to the outsider. Both by our attitudes but also by, I suppose, what our premises convey about our attitudes. That's why we did our refurbishment in this church here.

It wasn't to make ourselves more comfortable. It was genuinely to make the outsider more comfortable. to fit this building in more with the world of those outside walking up and down Buchanan Street.

We want to make our premises the most comfortable and pleasant place possible for people to come into so that they'll be exposed to what often really is, it has to be said, an uncomfortable and unpleasant message when people first encounter it.

The gospel that calls people to repent, to turn away from sin and from selfishness, to surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ. That's hard for people to hear. But unfortunately, so often today, the church seems to be doing the exact reverse.

It wants to attract people more by changing the message, by making the message more comfortable, more accommodating, by watering it down, making it much easier, while at the same time, just leaving their surroundings as dated and as uncomfortable as they've ever been.

[23 : 08] It seems to me that's absolutely back to front. Now, don't misunderstand me. I have a lot of personal reservations about the so-called seeker-friendly movement, where a church is so de-churched to entice the seeker that, in fact, almost everything, it seems, of substance is sometimes dispensed with, lest it should be a hindrance.

Including, very often, the challenge of the gospel. No, people must know, of course, that they've come into a church, not come into a circus. But we certainly mustn't be seeker-unfriendly.

When you invite people around for dinner, we make an effort, don't we, we want to show that we care enough about them to make the house clean or tidy. We don't have dirty washing lying around in the dining room, at least I hope not.

Or maybe if they're very good friends, but not people we don't know too well. We make an effort. We make an effort in our cooking, in what we wear, in planning the table settings and so on. We want them to see that we care about them.

We want to welcome them. Well, how much more when we're welcoming people into the home, the family of the Lord Jesus Christ? It's always worth asking, isn't it, are there things that we like, things that we fight to preserve, that actually might be a stumbling block to others?

[24 : 31] things that we do that really are far more to do with our own satisfaction than other people's salvation. Think how many things in the Christian life and in the Christian church would be transformed if we all always prioritized the gospel mindset.

Even simple things, like who you talk to after a church service. Of course we want to catch up with friends. But what about the newcomer? What about the lonely student who's far away from home and missing their family?

What about the new seeker who's come in just seeking answers about life? A person who's just longing for friendship?

A person who's grieving? Just wants a touch of human kindness? Think how many disputes in churches would disappear if everybody stopped before they complained, before we fell out with somebody and just said to themselves under the breath, I will not seek my own advantage in this. I will not put a stumbling block to the church's mission. No, I will become a slave to all for the sake of the gospel of Christ.

[25 : 51] Think about if in every decision that we were to make as a church, our touchstone was what will best serve the gospel of Christ? What will save others and glorify God?

Be imitators of me, says Paul. Prioritize the gospel in the nitty-gritty of church life and in church relationships. That's how you live to glorify God in all things.

Perhaps it sounds rather arrogant to you that Paul should dare to say, imitate me. Would you dare to say that?

I don't think I would dare to say that from this pulpit. And yet, Paul does say it often, not just here. But he does so because he is so obviously saying something much more, isn't he, than just, look at me.

What is he saying? Well, that's the third thing, isn't it? The pattern. The pattern. It's the Lord himself. Look at verse 1 of chapter 11. Be imitators of me as I am of Christ, the Son of Man himself who came not to be served but to serve, to give his life as a ransom for many.

[27 : 02] Imitate him, says Paul. He gave up all his rights, all his position and power and became a servant that by all means he might save sinners.

He became maligned. He became misunderstood. He's a friend of tax collectors and sinners, they said. He's dodgy morally. He keeps bad company. He's scandalized, didn't he, some very religious people.

But he became an outcast and he became despised that he might save the outcasts and the despised. And he supremely and above all prioritized the gospel mindset.

In Gethsemane, he prayed, not my will but thine. Not my satisfaction but their salvation.

That was his prayer. And Paul says, let this mindset be in you, his people. And if it is, then whatever we do, we'll begin to find ourselves saying, how can I do this for the sake of Christ and the gospel?

[28 : 12] How can I do this so that by all means I might save some? I have a friend who always shops in the same local shop just precisely so they can get to know the staff and become friends with them and share the message of the Lord Jesus Christ with them.

Maybe you go to a sports club or the gym just to get fit. Well, ask yourself, how can I do that for the gospel? I go at the same time every week and speak to the same people.

Can my social life, can my leisure time serve the gospel of Jesus Christ? John Dixon in his book that I mentioned last week says this in one place.

Those who most regularly get into spiritual conversations with others are usually the ones with a wide circle of non-believing friends in the first place. Believers who bring friends and family to church are usually those who have had dinner with them the week before.

You don't need a PhD to work that one out, do you? And it's true, but it's a challenge. You see, our message is important.

[29 : 27] It's vital. It's absolutely central because only the gospel has the power to save. The gospel is the power of salvation. But in a very real sense, so is the medium vitally important because that message has got to be heard.

It's got to be received. It's got to be welcomed. And that means that evangelism is more than just a message. It is a lifestyle. We've got to get a hearing for the gospel.

We've got to exhibit and show in our flesh the grace, the reality of the mercy and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. And in that sense, in a very real way, the medium is the message because it authenticates the truth.

It authenticates the message of grace. It displays it. It's real in our own flesh and blood, in our words and in our deeds. Jesus said, I am the light of the world.

But of course, the truth is today the Lord Jesus Christ is not visible on this earth, is he? And he won't be until he comes to reign in glory. People can't see Jesus anymore with their eyes, but they can see his people.

[30 : 41] That's why Jesus said to us, you are the light of the world. And he's put us in the world where we can't be hidden like a city set on a hill. What a tragedy then when the reflection of the Lord Jesus that people see in this world is so tainted, so distorted.

that the impression that they have of our Lord and Savior is one of ugliness and unattractiveness, not of his beauty and loveliness.

Sometimes think that when I see the marchers that we sometimes see coming around the church in these sectarian parades with their drums and their whistles and men in dog collars carrying on a cushion an open Bible and everybody in the procession has a face of absolute flint.

And I just think, what does this say about the Lord Jesus Christ? So I think that when you see Christian protesters, it can be just as ugly, can't it?

Of course there is a time for us to protest. There's a time to do all of these things, but there's a way to do it. That was Mahatma Gandhi's criticism, wasn't it? I like your Christ.

[31 : 58] I do not like your Christians, he said. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ. That's a very stinging criticism. And of course it is true, isn't it?

It's true of every one of us because every one of us is and always will be so far short of the beauty and the holiness of our Lord Jesus. And yet to be Christians is to be imitators of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because, and this is the only way that anyone can ever really begin to live the Christ-like life, because, says Paul, Christ is in us, the hope of glory.

We have received Christ Jesus as Lord and so we can and we must walk in Him, being rooted and built up in Him, says Paul to the church at Colossae. You have a new life in Christ.

His life is yours. By the Spirit. So I said to the Ephesians, you are children of light in the Lord, so walk as children of light. And that means, friends, that when you and I are as Christian people in our own lives and together as a church, we must live constantly burying the past.

[33 : 15] Our egocentric lives, our selfish lives, our self-worship. putting off the old self with all its sinful desires, is how Paul puts it.

And putting on our new self, created after the likeness of God in righteousness and holiness. It's just another way of saying, seeking not our own advantage, but that of many, that they might be saved.

John Dixon has a chapter in that book called Following the Friend of Sinners. And that's really what prioritizing the Gospel mindset is all about. It's about following the one who came not to be served, but to serve.

Being willing to go out of our way to show his love and his compassion and his mercy to others that they too might be saved. Do you think people see you and me as friends of sinners?

I often think a good test is simply to ask them, am I the sort of person that somebody would ever come to in distress if they'd made a terrible muck-up of their life, if they made some real moral disaster, got in some real personal mess?

[34 : 34] Am I the sort of person that somebody like that could come to? For some Christians, I know that if I was in that situation as I have been, I could go to them, I can tell them anything, anything like that, knowing that I will find grace and mercy from them in my time of need just because they are like the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Not surprising, is it, that those people tend to be people who have prioritized the gospel mindset in all that they do? A grace and mercy mindset, you might call it, in everything that they do.

Not seeking their own glory, their own satisfaction, but always seeking the glory of Christ and serving others.

Be imitators of me, says Paul, as I am of Christ. Prioritize the gospel mindset in all that you think and do as people and as a congregation of God's church.

Not self-satisfaction, but salvation-seeking. Must be our watchword. That's first base, says Paul, in any fruitful partnership in real gospel mission.

[36 : 05] Well, let's pray together. Lord, help us to take to heart your call to live always and only for your glory and so to measure every desire and every decision by the call of the gospel of your Son.

And may we truly, day by day and week by week, put on as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another even as you have forgiven us.

And above all, help us to put on love that binds everything together in perfect harmony. So may your love and your desire to forgive and restore lost sinners be seen clearly and brightly and winsomely through each one of us and through our fellowship together as partners in the gospel of your Son.

For we ask it for his name's sake. Amen.