

# The Church's Corporate Priority

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[ 0 : 00 ] But let's turn now to our Bible reading for this morning. If you don't have a Bible with you, we have plenty of visitor Bibles scattered around the place.! 1 Corinthians 9, and reading from verse 19.

So 1 Corinthians 9, verse 19. The Apostle Paul writing here. For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.

To the Jews, I became as a Jew in order to win the 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 the law of God, but under the law of Christ. That I might win those outside the law.

To the weak, I became weak. that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel that I may share with them and its blessings.

[ 1 : 43 ] 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. And I just flick on the chapter to chapter 10.

And reading from verse 23. All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up.

Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on ground of conscience. For the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.

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.

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. I do not mean your conscience, but his.

[ 2 : 52 ] For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks? So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God. Just as I try to please everyone and everything, I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that many may be saved.

Be imitators of me as I am of Christ. Amen. May the Lord bless his word to us this morning.

Perhaps you'd turn with me to 1 Corinthians 10. And our focus particularly this morning is just in those last few verses at the very end from verse 31.

We're beginning a brief new series this week, a little different from normal. We're not working through one particular book of the Bible or passage of Scripture, but rather focusing on a theme, a theme indeed that runs really all through the Bible and that is utterly foundational for the church.

[ 4 : 10 ] And that is the theme of the mission of the church, the calling of the people of God. And I want to focus on the corporate mission of the church, the fruitful partnership really in the gospel mission that is the calling in particular of the church of God in these last days, the days in which we live.

That is the time between Pentecost, that we've been looking at the last couple of weeks with Edward, and the culmination of this present age with the bodily return of the Lord Jesus to judge the whole world, to rule his everlasting kingdom.

And I say the corporate mission of the church because the call to mission is a call to partnership.

That is the partnership of the body of Christ together. People sometimes use that phrase or they talk about disciple making disciples.

But actually that's not the way that Jesus talks, not the way that the apostles talk. Jesus calls people into his church. And it is the church that makes disciples.

[ 5 : 36 ] It's a disciple making church. And it is the church corporately that is God's missionary vehicle of saving grace and mercy for this whole world.

And that was true also throughout the Old Testament times. In the Old Testament church, Israel's calling was to proclaim to the nations the one true God of all, to call all of them to worship him. We sang in Psalm 96, For all the gods of the nations are worthless idols, says the psalmist, but the Lord made the heavens. So worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness.

Tremble before him all the earth. That's the missionary cry of the Old Testament church. And now, of course, with the ultimate revelation of the one true God in the person of Jesus Christ.

And after his death and his resurrection and his ascension to the throne of glory, at the name of Jesus, says the apostle Paul, every knee should bow.

[ 6 : 40 ] And so now, the task of making known the name of the one true God is all the more urgent. Because these really are the last days of this world before Jesus returns to judge all the earth and all the heavens.

And that explains, doesn't it, Jesus' final words to his apostles before he ascended into heaven. You know them as the Great Commission. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

His is the name above every other name. Therefore, you go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

You see what his focus is? Jesus is the authority of King, the Lord, the ruler and judge of the whole world. And as Lord of all, we are commanded, therefore, to bow before his throne, to heed his command, to give him glory.

That's the calling of the church. That's the calling of the whole world. So it's so important to see that, isn't it? That the primary motivation for the mission of the church isn't ourselves.

[ 7 : 58 ] It's not even other people. It's that God should be honored and worshipped and obeyed and given the glory that is his by right as our Creator and as our Lord.

Because Jesus, the sovereign ruler, has been shown also to be the saving Redeemer of all of his people through God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So as John Piper puts it in the beginning of one of his books, his book on mission, the reason that mission exists is because worship doesn't, as it should do in this world.

All peoples don't, do they? Ascribe greatness and the glory that is due to the name of God. All people don't, as the psalmist urges. They don't tremble before him.

They don't worship him in the splendor of holiness. And that is the greatest scandal in this whole universe. The Bible tells us the heavens know the truth.

[ 9 : 06 ] If you read John's vision in the book of Revelation, chapter 4, you'll hear all heaven declaring, worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive honor and glory and power.

The heavens know the truth. They cast the crowns before him. But God has declared that this whole earth will do likewise. And he invites them.

Indeed, he commands them to worship Jesus, to worship his glorified son. And that is why the church has its task. And it is a corporate task.

Together, by our lips, but also by our lives, we are to declare his glory among the nations until there is need for gospel mission no longer.

Because true worship, worldwide worship, will have been restored. And we have the wonderful assurance that the church's task is aligned absolutely with God's definite will and purpose for this world.

[ 10 : 09 ] As Paul tells Timothy, there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all.

There is a way back to worship the one true God through Jesus. For people of every tribe and every nation and every culture, through a divine mediator that we can absolutely rely on because already he has given himself, says Paul, as a ransom for all such, whoever they are, wherever they've come from.

And God, our Savior, says Paul, desires people to be saved, desires people to come to a knowledge of the truth.

And that's the wonderful task, the wonderful partnership with God himself that we are called to by being part of his church here on earth. All authority in earth and heaven has been given to me, says the risen Lord.

Therefore, you go and make disciples. Now that is a command to the whole church, to the church together. It's plural, you plural. It's not just to a collection of individuals, but it's to a body.

[ 11 : 20 ] And we all have a part to play. Obviously, that specific command was given to his disciples, to the apostles of Jesus. But these apostles are there to pass that on to the whole church. And that's what they do all throughout the New Testament.

And that's what it means to belong to the church. It's the fellowship of God's people. That word communion, *koinonia*, that the New Testament uses often, it means partnership.

If you're in a business, if you're a partner in the business, you share in the profits of the business, don't you? But you also share in the work that generates the profits. And the church is that kind of partnership.

We all share in the work and we share in the fruit. Now, the church is a diverse body. The New Testament uses that metaphor frequently. We're not all the same.

We don't all have the same role. But all are connected, aren't we? And we all have some role to play. And indeed, there are some things that all of us without question are called to together if we're going to be a church truly in mission.

[ 12 : 23 ] And we begin to ask the question, well, how is that gospel mission to the world to happen through the church? The first answer, I think, I want to give is that it will never happen, will it, unless Christian believers, unless whole Christian churches prioritize a real gospel mindset.

A gospel mindset. That is and must always be the church's corporate priority. That we determine together to see all our life and to live all our life for the sake of Christ and his gospel and his glory. And that means like the Lord Jesus himself showed us, not living for ourselves and for our needs and for our wants, but living to love and to serve Christ, our King, in everything.

Living so that all that we do and all that we are is for the cause of Christ. that's prioritizing a gospel mindset.

Now, there are many, many places in the New Testament where we find the Apostle Paul teaching that. We can look at the whole letter to the Philippians, for example, where he talks so often about that partnership, that fellowship of a gospel lifestyle.

[ 13 : 42 ] Philippians 1, verse 27, 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.

Prioritizing a gospel mindset. Let that be the thing that unites you, that binds your life together, is what he's saying. And he goes on, doesn't he, in Philippians 2, to show that living out that mindset is living out the mind of Christ himself.

Don't live for your own interests, but for those of others. Have this mindset, this mind in you, the mind of Christ, who being in the very form of God, made himself nothing, took the form of a servant, even to death on a cross.

That's your mindset, the missionary mindset, Paul says. The gospel mindset that will give you everything you need to glorify God and to save sinners.

We're going to come another time to Philippians, but today I want to look at just these last few verses here. At the end of 1 Corinthians 10, from verse 31, just to that first line of chapter 11.

[ 15 : 00 ] Because Paul gives us here a very concise summary of what I'm calling the principle and the practice and the pattern for lives that really will prioritize that real gospel mindset.

Let me just read those first few verses again. So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 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. That concise instruction there about lives that prioritize that gospel mindset.

Look at verse 31. First of all, he gives us the principle, doesn't he? Do all to the glory of God. Now, it's very simple, isn't it? It's utterly comprehensive.

Consider the whole of your life, all that you do, all. From your food and drink to your home life, your work life, your leisure, your holidays, your friendships, everything.

[16:17] Not least how you think about and exercise your corporate life as the church, but do everything all to the glory of God. That's a real gospel mindset.

That's just logical, isn't it? If the glory of the one true God is to be proclaimed, if it's to be acknowledged in the whole world, then that message is not only to be spoken, but it's to be lived out in the world.

It's got to be a whole way of life, hasn't it? A missionary lifestyle. But that always will begin with a missionary mindset. I wonder if you've given much thought to that lately.

I wonder if you thought about that when the alarm clock went off this morning. Must get out of bed to the glory of God. Or every day when you get up, you put your clothes on and you eat your breakfast.

Or you get on the bus and you travel to work or whatever it is. Or you're doing your work in the office or the classroom or the hospital. Or when you're speaking in the staff room over the coffee break or whatever it is.

[17:25] Or how you're treating your customers if you have a business. and on and on and on and everything that you do every day. Am I doing this to the glory of God?

Very comprehensive statement of Paul's. Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. But you see, that is the principle of a real gospel mindset.

I once heard John Piper, the American preacher, giving a whole talk on how you can drink orange juice to the glory of God. I can't remember exactly, but it began with thanking God for the wonderful array of trees that he'd made.

And then thanking God specifically for orange trees and the great exultation on how orange trees grew. And then a whole lot about the water needed. And then about the picking of the oranges and the packing of the oranges and the machines that made oranges and on and on and on it went. It would be a great way to lose weight actually if you took that long before you had a sip of every glass of orange juice and every mouthful of food and so on. We don't have quite that amount of time, do we? But he was making a point that even in the simple things in life, there's a way to do it, thinking about it, to give glory to God.

[18:38] And Paul actually is going behind every action, isn't he? He's going behind it to the vital attitude that underlies all actions that will make them actions that are done either to glorify God or not to do so.

And you see, it's when we see that, it's when we see the context of what he's saying here that we'll understand better, I think, what it actually means for us in practice to do all for the glory of God. Which is just another way of saying what he says to the Philippians. Whatever happens, let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. So look at verses 32 and 33 here where Paul fleshes out this principle by pointing the Corinthians to his own practice.

The practice of this principle is seen, Paul says, in imitating his attitude in everything that he does. And it means, he says in verse 32, negatively giving no offense whether to Jews or to Greeks. I suppose we might say to those outsiders to the church or those who in some way are insiders to these things. Negatively giving no offense and positively seeking, he says, verse 33, to please everyone, not seeking his own advantage but those of many so that they might be saved.

[20:00] Do you see? That's how you practice the principle of doing all for the glory of God. You live not for your own satisfaction but for others' salvation.

And that means making very often a great deal of personal sacrifice according to Paul. If you read the context of what he's been talking about in this letter from chapters 8 to 10, it's all about the controversial issue as it was for them of whether Christians could or should eat food, eat meat that had been offered to idols in the temple.

It sounds very odd to us that whole issue but you see in that pagan culture and it's still true in some parts of the world today that most meat had to be dedicated to some idol or other in the temple before it was then sold in the shops around the temple or served in the restaurants of the city. So some Christians you see, particularly those from a Jewish background, very sensitive to food issues, they were horrified at the thought of tainting themselves by eating food that had been sacrificed to pagan gods in that way.

But then there were others including Paul who didn't have any such scruple because they knew that, well, idols are nothing and also they knew that as Jesus had said, nothing that goes into your mouth can really pollute you.

[ 21 : 28 ] It's what comes out of your mouth and the words that come from your heart, those are the things that really make you unclean. Now we've got no time to go into the whole issue but you see, Paul's point is clear.

The key thing isn't me and my conscience in this issue, he's saying. My feeling of keeping myself clean. Now when you've got a real gospel mindset, you realize that even if something is perfectly legitimate in itself, the real issue is will me doing this or not doing this hinder the gospel or help the gospel?

And Paul says anything that hinders the gospel, anything that causes offense, that word really means a stumbling block. Anything that puts a stumbling block in someone's way to understanding and heeding the gospel, anything that puts a stumbling block in somebody else's path to salvation, that I must avoid in order that nothing I do will ever hinder another person's salvation.

I'll give up, therefore, all my rights if need be. I'll give up all my personal satisfaction in order that some may be saved.

See, that's prioritizing a gospel mindset in your life. So Jews, he's trying to evangelize, might think it's scandalous if Paul said to them, look, I'd like to meet you and talk about the gospel.

[ 23 : 02 ] Let's have dinner together at Pagan Pizza Hut down the road in Corinth and I'll explain the gospel of Jesus to you. Well, even though Paul loves pagan pepperoni pizza at the local temple cafe, the Temple of Zeus cafe, he's not going to do that, is he?

He's forgoing that. He'd rather go and have vegetarian falafel with his Jewish friend in a synagogue cafe and said so that he can share the gospel with that Jewish friend, without offense, without causing a blockage.

But when his pagan friend, the Greek fellow, who thinks that, you know, these religious Jews are some kind of weird sectarians, when he's trying to speak to him about the gospel, he won't say to him, oh well, you've got to come and put on our special robes and come and eat our special food in our special place before I'll speak the gospel to you.

No, he'll go and enjoy lunch in the pagan temple and talk to him about Jesus there. You see, he's not demanding a right to live for himself with all the freedoms that he knows he has.

He's willing to make sacrifices, personal sacrifices, for other people's salvation because he's living by a mantra that says it's not about my satisfaction, it's about other people's salvation.

[ 24 : 25 ] Look back to the passage you read in chapter 9 verse 19. Again, you see, he explains it so helpfully there, doesn't he? Verses 19 to 23. For though I am free from all, I've made myself a servant to all.

Why? That I may 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 may win those under the law.

To those outside I became as one outside the law, not being outside the law of God, of course, but in the law of Christ, that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak.

I become all things to all people that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them its blessings.

I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that by all means I might save some. You see, that's prioritizing a real gospel mindset in practice, seeking to do everything to the glory of God.

[ 25 : 37 ] Friends, you see, if we are going to be fruitful partners together in the church's mission, then we need to think like that too, don't we? That's the pattern. We need in our lives and we need in our church life together to follow Paul in that self-effacing, in that sacrificial commitment to become servants to all for the sake of Christ.

And that will mean both sensitivity to the way that others think and the way that others feel, feel, outsiders, non-Christian people, and sacrifice sometimes of the things that we like, the way we like to do things.

Sacrifices so that others may come to know Christ and others will be built up in Christ. So, for example, today, I suspect, around the country, there are still some folk in churches who, in some ways, are a little bit like those first century Jews that Paul was seeking to evangelize.

They're quite religious. They've been brought up in the church. But, actually, they've never really heard the gospel properly explained, properly preached.

There's a lot fewer of those folk these days, but, because we live in a society now, don't we, where most people have really no church connection at all. But there are still those among the older generation, perhaps, some particularly in more rural places and so on, village churches, where that's true.

[ 27 : 08 ] People have been in church all their lives, but they've never, ever actually heard the gospel. It's extraordinary, but it's true. Suppose a church that night gets a new minister who does know the gospel and who does proclaim the gospel.

And he goes into this church that he sees as utterly high-bound and fossilized in all its old traditional ways, and he can't stand that nonsense. The choir of a few old warbling women, a congregation that expects him to wear a dog collar and robes and parade up to the front and all sorts of nonsense.

He thinks, oh my goodness, this is so antiquated, it's terrible. He hates it. But if he's got any sense at all and if he has a gospel mindset, what he knows is that what that church needs is not a refurb of the way they order their service about, but what they need is the living gospel.

And he's asking himself, how will I enable these people to hear the gospel? So instead of suddenly changing everything and throwing out the organ and the choir and ditching the robes and burning the pews and starting to sing all sorts of songs that people hate and causing a great stromash in the church, if he's got any wisdom at all, he will put up with all kinds of things that he hates.

He'll even put on robes every Sunday and he'll do what they've been used to be doing in order that he doesn't needlessly offend them in order that he doesn't put a stumbling block in their path so that they will listen perhaps when he does preach Christ to them and understand the need to be born again, to respond, that coming to church and doing these things alone is just not enough, that what they need is the living word of Christ in their hearts.

[ 28 : 53 ] See, for him that's prioritizing a gospel mentality and in time as people begin to understand the gospel and what really matters, well then many of those things that aren't really gospel matters at all will fall away, won't they, gradually?

Now some of course will be offended, some will be offended and get very angry at his message but they will be being offended by the gospel, not by a whole lot of other things that are unnecessary to cause offense.

Well I'm very glad I don't have to wear robes and all of these things but I'll tell you what, if it would get a hearing for the gospel in certain places I would do it. I've done it on occasions when I've had to do weddings in the university chapel and things like that or where somebody has said, look their family are very churchy and they won't think you're a proper minister if you don't wear these things. Thankfully it doesn't happen very much but I'm willing to do it for the sake of the gospel. Of course more often today of course it's actually total outsiders that we need to think about as people who have never been in church in their life and we need to think about how we win them to Christ from totally outside the church.

We don't want to do anything that will make them stumble. That's why we want to make our premises as comfortable and as pleasant for people to come into as they can be.

[ 30 : 13 ] That's why we want to make the atmosphere one of friendliness and welcome and encouragement because we want to make it easy for people to come and be exposed to what is actually a very uncomfortable and indeed an unpleasant message when they first encounter it because the gospel does call people to repent, doesn't it?

It calls people to turn around and away from selfishness and sin. It calls people to surrender to the lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the problem of course today is that so often the church can get it absolutely upside down.

We want to try and attract people by making the message more comfortable and the message more accommodating and the message much more watered down in the hopes that perhaps somebody might be attracted to it.

And yet often actually it happens in buildings where the surroundings are as dated or as uninviting as you could possibly imagine. But it's absolutely back to front, isn't it?

Don't misunderstand me. I'm not selling you a kind of cheap version of the seeker-friendly movement where the church is so de-churched in order to apparently entice the seeker that everything of substance is dispensed with in case it could be a hindrance including very often as I've said much of the challenge of the gospel.

[ 31 : 43 ] No, no, no. People do need to know that when they're coming to church it is a church and not a circus. We don't want to be unfriendly to the seeker but we must be real.

But in all of these things do you see what Paul is saying? We're not seeking our own advantage but the advantage of many that they may be saved. When you invite friends around for dinner I take it that we show we care about them enough to make sure our house is at least looking generally quite clean and tidy make a bit of an effort with the food on the table what we wear we plan the table settings and so on we don't kind of invite folk around for dinner and expect them to kind of join in total and utter chaos it shows respect doesn't it?

And I suppose we should think how much more when we invite folk to our church's home to glorify God we should be thinking about those sorts of things showing them that we care enough.

Think about how many things in church life would be transformed if we all prioritized all the time that real gospel mindset even simple things like who you talk to after a service of course we want to catch up with people we know of natural we're part of a family but what about the newcomer what about the lonely student maybe far from home what about that seeker looking for answers in life what about the person who's just longing for a friend someone to speak to someone to show them kindness I think week by week we are quite good at doing that but it's right isn't it because we don't come here for ourselves we're coming here together to glorify God to show his love to others what do we think about when we think about where we're going to live where we buy a house where we're going to work is it always first to serve our needs my needs my own advantage my family or is it how we better serve

Christ how many of us put those things in the right order when we make big life decisions are our life decisions which in fact are temporary decisions made in the light of eternal matters it's a challenge isn't it think about how many disputes in churches would disappear if everyone stopped before they complained before they fell out with someone and said to themselves no I won't seek my own advantage I won't put a stumbling block to our church's mission I will become a slave to all for the sake of the gospel if in every decision that we were making about changes we would be thinking about what will serve best the glory of God and his gospel what best will serve others and their salvation rather than how would I like it to be what's best for me

[ 34 : 53 ] Paul says be imitators of me prioritize the gospel in the nitty gritty of church life and church relationships that's how you live to glorify God in all things in practice that's what it looks like you might think it sounds arrogant for Paul to say imitate me I wonder if you would dare to say that imitate me but Paul says it often actually surprisingly often and he says it because he is so obviously saying more than that isn't he he's not just saying look at me what he's saying is look at the Lord Jesus Christ and that's the third thing isn't it you see to really understand the principle and the practice we need the real pattern to follow look at verse the first line of chapter 11 be imitators of me as I am of Christ 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 he gave up all rights all position all power and became a servant that by all means he might save sinners he was maligned wasn't he he was misunderstood oh he's a friend of tax collectors and sinners beyond the pale to many he scandalized a lot of very religious types didn't he he became outcast he became despised in order to reach the outcasts and the despised because he supremely prioritized that gospel mindset not my will but thine was his prayer wasn't it not my satisfaction but their salvation and paul says let this mindset be in you and if it is then whatever you do you'll begin to find yourself saying well how can i do this for the sake of the gospel so that by all means i might save some i had a friend who always used to go to the same local shop whatever he needed even though the stuff there was a bit more expensive or didn't have the range that a bigger shop would have had but he did it so that he got to know the staff very well so they could witness to them constantly or maybe you go to a gym or you play sport or whatever it is what can you do that for the sake of the gospel what are your hobbies in life where do you go where does your work take you where does your social interaction take you you can do all for the sake of the gospel or you can do it just for your sake how does your social time how does your leisure time serve the gospel one writer says this 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 along to church are usually the ones who had dinner with these loved ones in the weeks before that's just obvious isn't it that's not rocket signs but it's a challenge isn't it you see our message is vitally important it is the power of God for salvation only the gospel has power to save

people the message is vitally important but therefore so is the medium when I was a student there was a popular book that we all read called evangelism as a lifestyle and you see the new testament is actually teaching us that evangelism is a lifestyle it's not just a series of ploys to get a hearing for the gospel but we are called aren't we in life in the flesh to show the reality of the grace of God in our lives in a very real sense the saying is true the medium is the message because it authenticates the message the message of God's grace in the flesh Jesus is the light of the world but the Lord Jesus is no longer visible is he in this earth he won't be until he comes again to reign in glory so people can't see the Lord Jesus with their earthly eyes but they can see the people of the Lord Jesus the church and Jesus says doesn't he to his people you are the light of the world and he puts us in the world so we can't be hidden and we're not to be hidden it's a terrible tragedy isn't it when when the reflection of the Lord Jesus in this world that people see is so distorted is so tainted that actually their impression of our

Lord and Savior is one of ugliness one of unattractiveness I'll never forget once being in the center of Glasgow I think it was a Sunday afternoon and one of these sectarian marches was coming along can't remember which lodge it was but I'll never forget seeing these men marching along holding big black Bibles with faces that were so contorted with hatred and looked so grim and I just felt so ashamed to see the Bible being carried in public in that context sometimes Christians or professing Christians protesting about things can be just as ugly can't it there's a time to protest there's a time for action there's a time to be involved in the political progress process on all of these things but there's also a way to do it isn't there Mahatma Gandhi's criticism of

Christianity was terribly stinging wasn't it I like your Christ I do not like your Christians your Christians are so unlike your Christ that's a terribly stinging criticism and of course to an extent we have to acknowledge it's true of every one of us isn't it we are we will always so far fall short of the beauty and the holiness of our Lord Jesus Christ because we're sinful people and yet to be Christian is to be called isn't it to be imitators of Christ because of course and this is the only way anyone can really begin to live the Christ-like life we can be because Christ is in us the hope of glory that's what Paul tells the Colossians we have received Christ Jesus as Lord and so we can and must walk in him being rooted and built in him we have a new life in Christ his life is in us by his Holy Spirit you are children of light in the Lord

[ 42 : 26 ] Paul says to the Ephesian church so walk as children of light and that means friends that you and I as Christian people and especially all of us together as the Christian church Paul says we must live constantly putting off burying the past of our egocentric lives our self-worship putting that off and putting on the new self which is created he says after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness that's all Paul is saying here in verse 33 not seeking our own advantage but that of many that they may be saved John Dixon the Australian evangelist in his book Promoting the Gospel has a chapter called Following the Friend of Sinners Following the Friend of Sinners and that's really in many ways what prioritizing a gospel mindset is all about it's about following the one who came not to be served but to serve sinners and being willing like him to go out of our way to show his love to show his compassion to others that they might be saved it's a great question to ask ourselves isn't it do people see us does somebody see me does somebody see you as a friend of sinners does somebody see us in this church is this a place which is a friend of sinners it's a good test to ask am I the kind of person that somebody would come to in distress maybe if they made a great muck up of their life got a real mess morally or in a personal life in some other way or whatever it would be there's some

Christians that I know that I could go to and I could tell them anything about that and they wouldn't scorn me they wouldn't condemn me I would find grace and mercy in my time of need I was speaking on Wednesday evening about my pastor when I was a student William Still he was a man like that yes he was a lion in the pulpit but he was a lamb gentle with people a friend of sinners it's not surprising is it that that such people tend to be people who have prioritized the gospel mindset a grace and mercy mindset in everything they do because they're people who are filled with the knowledge of the wonder of God's grace God's mercy in their own life so they can't be people who are seeking their own glory seeking satisfaction but they prize they cherish the grace of God in Christ so much and they want to serve others for his sake so they can share that same grace and mercy be imitators of me says Paul as I am of Christ prioritize a real gospel mindset in all you think in all you do as a church all of us together not self satisfaction but salvation seeking for others that's first base really in any fruitful partnership in real gospel mission it's where it begins in the mind and

in the heart let this mindset be in use as Paul well let's pray

Lord help us we pray to take to heart your call to live always to live only for your glory so that we will really measure every desire every decision by the call of the gospel of your son and so may we 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 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 and so may your love and your desire to forgive and restore lost sinners be seen clearly and brightly and warmly and wondrously even through us and our church and we ask it for the sake of our

Lord Jesus Christ Amen