

What anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. ²² **Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I.** ²³ **Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.** ²⁴ **Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.** ²⁵ **Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,** ²⁶ **I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers.** ²⁷ **I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.** ²⁸ **Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.** ²⁹ **Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?**

³⁰ **If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.** (NIV84)

Theme: Dedicate yourself completely to Christ.

1. Devote your body.
2. Devote your heart and mind.

If you truly love something and you want to be good at it, you are going to dedicate yourselves to the pursuit of it. For example, an athlete trains for many hours a day so that he could get better at the sport he loves. A musician is going to practice and work hard at writing lyrics and arranging the score until he gets it just right. An author does weeks and months of research on the topic he is going to write about. We could go on and on with examples. If you truly enjoy what you do, you are going to dedicate your life to the pursuit of it. The same thing stands for being a Christian. As Christians we love Christ. But at times we fail to completely dedicate our whole lives to him and his Word. But today we see the example of Paul, who did just

that. He motivates you to dedicate yourself completely to Christ—to devote both your body and your mind.

In our text for today Paul is pointing out that he is a true servant of the gospel. For he willingly suffered for Christ. He went through numerous trials and troubles for the sake of the gospel. If Paul wasn’t a true servant of Christ, then he would have walked away long before. But not Paul, he willingly faced it. Just take a look at all the things Paul suffered through for the sake of the gospel. He was frequently thrown in prison. Five times he was flogged with the 40 lashes minus one. Long before 39 his life would have been threatened—he could have been left crippled or disfigured. Three times from the Romans he was beaten with rods. This was almost worse than the flogging. That is 8 times he was beaten for spreading the gospel. Add on top of this the time in Lystra when he was pelted with stones—left for dead! It was only a miracle from God that led him to be safe from harm. Paul made many journeys during his ministry. We’ve heard of his three missionary journeys that are recorded in Acts. He also made another journey to Rome when he was arrested. We assume he also made it to Spain another journey. But it wasn’t easy or safe to travel back then. He was shipwrecked three times. And keep in mind that this letter was written in AD 55, a few years before Paul’s shipwreck that was recorded in Acts. He faced bandits and robbers. From nature and men, Paul suffered for the sake of the gospel. He continues, **I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.** Once Paul had to be let down from a city wall in a basket simply so he could avoid death. Paul willingly suffered through all of this for the sake of the gospel. And eventually Paul would die for the preaching about Christ. It is safe to say that Paul completely dedicated himself for the sake of Christ.

Can the same be said of you? How well do you follow Paul's example? Sadly, I'm guessing, not all that well. Now it's true that many of you don't have the privilege dedicating your whole life for the gospel like Paul had, or I or other called workers have. But that doesn't mean we can't dedicate our lives to him. Yet is something that isn't seen too often. Oh sure, we see examples of people dedicating themselves to Christ in part—from time to time, but not all the time. You do it when you want to, but if it's something you don't want to do, than there is no way you are going to volunteer. We see great examples of people who have dedicated their time but taking care of God's house and by using their talents to make updates for it. But others see their time and talents too valuable. They just can't give up anytime for Christ.

Then there are the physical altercations. Now we may not face the persecution that Paul faced. We may never be stoned, flogged, or beaten with rods simply for spreading the gospel. But if you were ever faced with that situation, what would you do? Would you face it willingly and keep on sharing your faith, or would you run and hide, cower in a corner? Would you be willing to face death, be shipwrecked, robbed, and beaten for the sake of the gospel? Would you be willing to dedicate your body, maybe even your life as a servant of Christ? Sadly the answer may not always be, 'yes.' Some are often unwilling to dedicate a few hours of their time to clean, mow, or to volunteer some other way, let alone give up with physical well-being. Yes, we often fail to dedicate our bodies for Christ as Paul did.

But why would Paul give up his body for the sake of Christ? Because of what Christ did for him. Because Christ first gave up his body for him. He did this on the cross. Christ never sinned against God. He was completely innocent. Yet he was sentenced to death on a cross—a sentence Christ willing let happen. For he knew on that cross he would take away our sins. He would take them upon himself and becoming guilty of all our sins—including when we fail to dedicate ourselves to him. So he suffered what our sins deserved—eternal punishment in hell as he was forsaken by his Father. Then he gave us his perfect life so that we would not be sinners in God's sight. It was on that cross that Jesus suffered and gave up his life, so that we might be saved. And three days after Christ gave up his life on the cross, he was made alive again. For he rose from the dead to prove

that he has saved us. Through the work of Christ we are saved. And he sends his Holy Spirit through his gospel. And through that gospel he works faith into our hearts. He has brought us to faith and washes away our sins through the waters of baptism. Through his body and blood together with the bread and the wine he too forgives our sins. Christ not only forgives us he wants us to be assured of that forgiveness. So he makes his Word readily available to us at all time. He gives us that tangible forgiveness in the Lord's Supper. Because Christ gave up everything for us and completely dedicated himself for us, we dedicate our lives to him. It's Christ and his work that motivates us to devote our lives to him. We don't care if we face imprisonment or physical punishment. We may even die for the sake of the gospel some day. It is his death and resurrection that moves us to volunteer our time and efforts to beautify his house. Because of Christ we don't mind doing this—in fact we do it willingly. We willingly, out of love and thanks, devote our bodies to him.

But we don't just devote our bodies to him, we also devote our hearts and minds.

But is that what you do? Sadly not—at least not all the time. You just don't have the time, you tell yourself. Or you have better things to do. You devote your time to your family, or job, or hobbies. You make sure to make time for your friends or chores. But sadly sometimes you may be unwilling to give up sleep, or work, or the kids' ball games for the sake of Christ. You're dedicated to making more money, getting enough sleep, having fun, or so on. But your hearts and minds may not be dedicated to Christ

So instead worshiping every Sunday, you make it every once in awhile. You come when it is convenient for you. Only when it fits into you schedule. They simply don't dedicate themselves completely to Christ. Perhaps you despise the offering plate. You find it offensive that you are expected to give some of you hard-earned money to God. It takes true devotion and dedication to God to willingly give back to him. It is a result of faith and indicates trust in God and his protection. As it turns out you may not be all that dedicated to Christ. You're devoted to your money, happiness and comfort, so you keep away from Christ.

But then we see the example of Paul. He wrote in verse 28, **I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.** This is one of the things that kept Paul up at night. Paul was concerned about the spiritual well-being of every Christian congregation. Some of them he started, others he visited. Some he knew well, others he had never met before. As you read Paul's letters to various congregations, it's not hard to see the deep care and concern he has for his fellow believers. While he was concerned with the physical well-being of those he was writing to, he was more concerned about their spiritual well-being. So his letters often focus on teaching the truth and attacking the lie. It was Paul who commanded the Thessalonians to **pray continually.** And no doubt, he followed his own advice. Paul faced daily pressure and concern for all the churches. So I'm sure he spent many sleepless nights in prayer for all the churches.

In order to do this Paul needed to completely dedicate his body and mind. Paul did this because he wanted people to know Christ and his forgiveness. He wanted them to see God's grace. That we have already been saved, our sins have been paid for by Christ. That there is nothing we have done, can do, or will do that leads to our eternal life. That even though we were sinners and God's enemies, he still sent his Son who gave up his life for us all. That we receive all the blessings Christ won for us through faith. So this led Paul to emphatically and constantly teach salvation by grace through faith. It led him to point out the sins of others so they may repent and see the free forgiveness of their Savior, Jesus Christ.

May we follow Paul's example. May we share the gospel so that others may believe and so that believers may be strengthened in their faith. Follow Paul's example in praying continually. Pray for the spiritual well-beings of all people. Keep fellow Christians the front of center of your minds. Do everything you can to help and support them. And most importantly comfort and encourage others with the message of the gospel. For the message of God's love and grace is what motivated Paul to dedicate his mind to Christ.

And this is what motivates us to devote our minds to God and his Word. It is his grace that leads us to open up our bank accounts and give generously back to him. It's what leads us to dedicate our hearts and minds to him. It is the love he has for us that leads us to worship him and to study his Word. So we devote an hour a week to worship

him, an hour a week to study his Word at Bible Class, 15 minutes a day to study his Word, and so on. Again, it's not a burden, but something we willingly and cheerfully do. Because of what he's done for us we dedicate our hearts and minds to him.

Like the athlete, author, musician, and so on; if you are able and if you truly love something, you are going to dedicate your whole lives to that cause. The same stands for being a Christian—even more so. Let us dedicate our bodies and our minds to Christ—yes completely dedicate yourselves to Christ. Give up time, talents, treasures, feelings, emotions, maybe even our life for Christ and his work. For the gospel is the only message which saves from death, so it is the only message worth dying for. Amen.