

# What Would Paul Do?

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**Bible Text:** 1 Corinthians 11:1  
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This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to two very specific places in the New Testament. We're going to spend the majority of our time today in the book of 1 Corinthians 11, and then toward the middle to the end part of the message we're going to make our way to the book of Acts 9. So 1 Corinthians 11, Acts 9.

You notice today that we have done so rightly and here's what I mean, according to the world around us, we have entered a new year. The clocks have turned over. The calendars have turned over. It's a time of new expectations. It's a time of desires and hopes, goals and resolutions, yet at the same time, those of us who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ have to wonder will this be the year in which he returns? In fact, one of the things that we're taught all throughout scripture is to always have his return, to always have his coming at the forefront of our hearts and our minds. You know, I don't know about you but there's a lot of years that have passed that I thought he should have come by now and he has not. And so really today as we look at these two specific verses, I want to address this very timely topic in light of the fact that we know at any time, any moment, this year, next, or whenever the Lord could return, how do we navigate life? How do we live life? How do we go day-by-day with the knowledge and the understanding of his soon return yet with just the grind of life between now and then?

If you've begun the Bible reading plan that we put out this year, you'll notice that we started in the book of Acts and this week as you hopefully will join us in this Bible reading plan, you're going to be introduced to someone who I hope is very familiar to you, his name collectively is the Apostle Paul, Saul of Tarsus, whom we know well in scripture, and today as we go to 1 Corinthians 11, I want you to see a statement that he makes. We're not going to take this out of context, after all, what we know as the church of Corinth was a carnal church, they were struggling with a lot of difficulties. It's one of many congregations that he communicated with and that he wrote to, but I want you to hear a statement that he makes, then we're going to unpack that because I think out of any statements that the Lord gave us through the Apostle Paul, this may be one of the ones that will help us best navigate each and every day until the Lord returns.

1 Corinthians 11:1-2, it says,

1 Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. 2 Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.

What the Apostle Paul is saying is as one who saw the risen Lord and we'll talk about that in just a moment, as one who was called to be an apostle, a very select group of individuals, he said that you and I ought to follow him as he follows Christ, we ought to do as he is doing, we ought to respond to what he has spoken to us. This is a powerful statement because a little over a hundred years ago there was a very famous book which was actually an abstract of a group of sermons that basically posed this question and, by the way, we've made a fad out of this and there's nothing wrong with it but basically the question goes a little something like this: what would Jesus do? Now again, I'm not against that statement, I'm not against that phrase, I'm not against anything that is meant by that, however, I think we would all admit that we've known people that have taken great liberty with that statement, okay? They've seen the absence of some specific issues that are in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, they've conjectured what they think or thought Jesus might have or not done under said circumstances, but then we have the letters of the Apostle Paul and if you have not read 1 Corinthians, it's very specific. It's going to deal with how we handle our marriages. It's going to handle how we deal with our children, our employers, our employees, our finances, the government, all these different... in fact, you read the letters of whom we know as the Apostle Paul and there's a whole lot of specifics that are dealt with as he said as he followed Christ.

So today, I want to ask a very important, somewhat rhetorical question: what would Paul do? Because he told us to imitate him, do as he is doing, and whatever he speaks to follow therein. So let's kind of unpack that with a series of pretty simple questions yet profound this morning. The first one is this, is when does this take place? And I don't mean the question he's asked, I mean the statement that he makes. 1 Corinthians 11, when does this take place in his life? Well, what we know as the conversion of Saul of Tarsus takes place in Acts 9. Now we're going to turn there in just a moment, not yet this moment. Acts 9, he is faithful to Judaism, he's on his way to Damascus, in fact, the Bible says he has letters, he has documentation with permission to apprehend believers whether they be men, women, or younger, and apprehend them because they follow "the way they believe in Jesus Christ." There in Acts 9, he sees a bright light, he hears the voice of Jesus, he sees him literally high and lifted up, much like Isaiah said in Isaiah 6, and there for three days his eyes are covered with scales. Ananias, we'll discuss him in just a moment, comes and lays his hands upon him and from that day forward the "rest is history."

Now the reason that that's important to 1 Corinthians 11 is this: when he made this statement "as I'm following Jesus you need to follow me," he didn't say this the first year after his conversion. He didn't even say this within the first decade. In fact, whom we know as the Apostle Paul has been following Jesus now for about 20 years. I mean, he's what we might call a seasoned believer. Yes, he's a called apostle but he's been doing this for a while. In the book of Galatians 2, he's recounting his testimony. He does this several times throughout the New Testament going back to that Acts 9 event talking about how

the Lord spoke to him and how he responded, and he speaks about that conversion, and then he says that about 14 years later, he went down to Jerusalem and he met Peter, James and John, and there in Galatians he says, "And I perceived them to be pillars of the church." They were that which was upholding things, after all, they were the ones that saw the resurrected Lord in the flesh. They were there at Pentecost. They'd been a part of all these things. He makes an interesting statement there in Galatians 2, he says, "And they gave me the right hand of fellowship." Now that statement may not weigh as much on you as it needs to. You do realize that this same Peter, James and John bragged about they had no dealings with the Gentiles. They bragged that they had no interaction with them. I mean, they were the Jews of the Jews and they were proud of it.

You say, "Why is that so important?" Because of who whom we know as the Apostle Paul is. In Romans 11:13, there is a fascinating statement that is made that he makes in light of what we just read in 1 Corinthians 11. He said, "I am the apostle to the Gentiles." Now why is this so important for you and I? Because Peter, James and John, remember the ones who he met 14 years after the fact, they were to stay in Jerusalem. They stayed there among the Jews. They ministered to those of those famous tribes. They went into the synagogue on a regular basis. They worked from the "inside out," and when they gave him the right hand of fellowship, when they sent him out in those famous missionary journeys that all those maps in the back of your Bible chronicle for us, that is him going to the Gentiles.

Now let me tell you why this is important. There may be a few of you here in person or watching online that are not a part of what I'm about to share but for the overwhelming majority of us, most of us are a bunch of pig-eating heathen Gentiles. That's who we are. You do realize that, at least here, the barbecue is pork, right? I mean, again, we collectively are those who Peter, James and John snubbed their nose at. We are those that even in the Old Testament court system had an outer court. We are those that in Acts 10 it says and the Jews marveled that the same Holy Spirit that descended upon them in Acts 2 came upon the Gentiles as well.

Now the reason this is so critical is in 1 Corinthians 11 the Apostle Paul makes this statement, he says, "Follow me as I follow Christ." Peter, James and John gave him the right hand of fellowship and he declared in the book of Romans 11, "I am the apostle to the Gentiles." So you and I when we're weighing decisions about our family, when we're weighing decisions about our finances, when we're weighing decisions about our future and all these things, then we need to spend some time in these letters that the Lord gave us through the Apostle Paul. We need to look at his life. We need to see what he said and look how he behaved and the mannerisms in which he possessed.

The third question is where, where was Paul when he communicated this truth to the church at Corinth when he said, "You need to follow me as I follow Christ. I need you to do what I've said, I need you to perform the ordinances in your life." Well, according to Acts 20:29, he was in Ephesus. Now we know there's a book to the Ephesians, the church at Ephesus. That's literally where he is when he makes this statement. If you've read the book of Ephesians, if you've done any study therein, you'll know that Ephesus was just

saturated with idolatry. In fact, that's how most people made their living. You know, we talk about that different communities have different industries, and in those respective industries there are times where certain industries somewhat just kind of lay the groundwork for a community, they lay the economic groundwork, the philosophical groundwork. In Ephesus, that industry whereby almost every single family was somehow connected to was in the making and the profiting off of idolatry. And do you know what he says in Acts 20:29? From Ephesus here's the statement he makes, he said, "I send warning to you lest in my absence grievous wolves come in and spoil what God has started."

Now if you'll allow me to kind of package those three questions together, when the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 makes this statement, "You need to follow me as I follow Christ," he's warning us, he's warning us that there are grievous wolves, he is warning us that there are those that are "wolves in sheep's clothing," there are those who desire danger and destruction in our lives, and so if we want to not go down those paths, we'd better pay attention to what he did and we'd better listen to the words that God gave him to communicate to us. So big questions are what is it that the Lord gave us through Paul, and why is it important? Here's the first aspect of the "what" here. There's a certain process by which the Apostle Paul communicates to us about how we walk with Jesus. Remember what he said in verse 1 of 1 Corinthians 11, "Follow me as I follow Christ." All right, I want you to turn to Acts 9 and I want you to see the process by which he mentions it. Now remember, this is his conversion. We've already talked about this earlier. For three days his eyes have been covered with scales. Ananias comes, lays hands on him and calls him Brother Saul. Now some of you may not like the calling that God's put on your life, can you imagine having that one? I mean, can you imagine being called to lay hands, in a good way, on the man who has legally been persecuting and killing those of like faith?

Verse 17 and 18 of Acts 9, it says,

17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. 18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

Now I'm not going to spend the entirety of the message on this, and I could, I just want to spend just a brief moment. You know, there's a lot of discussion, there is a lot of debate, in fact, I hear this on a regular basis, "You know, do I really need to be baptized?" Well, no, you don't have to go underwater to go to heaven, I get that. Is it really that important? Is it really that significant? Is it really that big of a deal? What did Paul say in 1 Corinthians 11? "Follow me." What did he do the first week he was saved? Got baptized. I mean, that's what he did. He got saved, he met the Lord Jesus Christ, said he was filled with the Holy Ghost and then he was baptized. Now I'm just going to be completely frank and honest with you: if we can't get that right, how are we going to get the rest of this

right? That's week 1. He didn't argue. He didn't question. He didn't debate it. And you do realize this was a man who grew up memorizing the Torah in the synagogue and did everything the "Jewish way," and within one week the Lord Jesus has such a grip of his life he is now publicly declaring his faith in the one whom he killed people in the name of just a week earlier. When we talk about the process, he said, "I got saved. God got ahold of me and I told the whole world that I identified with Jesus Christ."

Colossians 2 toward the end of the Apostle Paul's ministry, he makes this great statement for those of us who believe in Christ Jesus, he said, "Walk in his ways." Now think about walking for just a moment. Some of you are doing a whole lot more walking this week than you've done in a whole year because it's a new year and you communicated to your family and friends that you had ambitions and goals and they actually gave you what you said you wanted and that's some type of watch or instrument that tells you how many steps you've taken. Now people, we're obsessed with our steps. You know, how many steps can we take, and you know, for some of us our steps aren't as long as your steps and so we can take the same number of steps and you've gone a whole other county than some of us have gone. But here's the beautiful thing about walking: wherever you are headed, whatever destination you desire, by walking you cannot get there any other means than one step at a time, and one of the biggest struggles that I see in "Christians' lives" is we want to long jump to the goal, and we want to get there now. What did he say? Walk. Take a step each and every day. There's a phrase in our culture called baby steps, if we take enough of them we will eventually get to where we desire to be. One of the things the Apostle Paul is communicating in Acts 9 at his conversion is he just took the next step. He didn't get ahead of God. He didn't stay behind. He just took the process of walking.

So who are the persons involved? In the book of 1 Thessalonians which hopefully over the next couple of months you're going to get to know real well, 1 Thessalonians is chronologically the first letter of the Apostle Paul that the Lord gives us, and the very first verse of the very first chapter of the first letter that the Lord gives us through Paul, it begins, "Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, unto the church at Thessalonica." You say, "Well, most of his letters start that way. It's not real exciting." Then you get to chapter 2, verse 6, and do you know what it says? "Be followers of us." Now I'm going to use a very rudimentary illustration but it's very apropos. How do most people, most children learn to walk? They watch their parents. How do most of us, and we'll talk more about this in a moment, how do we know how to behave? How do we know how to respond? How do we know how to act? Because we see what others have done and we emulate it, we imitate it. We are very guilty of walking in the same cadence and directions as those that have gone before us, and that's what he said from the very beginning, he said, "This whole thing of Christianity, you don't get to just make it up anyway you want, you don't get to just define it how you so choose, you've got to do it the way I've showed you and the way I told you."

So what's the product? What is he communicating here? What will happen when we just walk, following, listening, doing, imitating and emulating? Back in 1 Corinthians 3, beginning in verse 10, he makes an interesting series of statements. It says that there is

coming a day as a believer that you will meet Jesus face-to-face. Now later on, the Apostle Paul says that which is now darkly seen will then be clear, but there's coming a day no matter how many days the Lord gives you, how many weeks, how many months, how many years, how many decades, there is coming a day, Christian, where you will meet Jesus face-to-face and there in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 it says and when you do so, your life is going to be before you and it says and before you as tried by fire there will be wood, hay, stubble, gold, silver and precious things. It's a very simple illustration. The wood, hay and stubble will be burned up. The gold, the silver and the precious stones will be preserved for presentation.

You say, "Why is that important to today's message?" Because in 1 Corinthians 11 what did he say? He said, "Follow me. Do it the way I'm doing it." Is there anybody who did it better than Paul? I don't think so, and yet how many of us one day will stand before Jesus and he sees or takes a decision or something that we did and it's burning up like wood and you say, "But, but, but, I thought that was gold!" Do you see the key word there "I thought"? "I was told that was silver. I felt that that was precious stones." He says, "No, because according to what I wrote, according to what I gave you, it was wood, hay and stubble." You see, one of the most important things that we need to understand today is the Apostle Paul didn't give us the instructions he did under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to ruin our lives, to spoil our lives, he did so because he knew one day you're going to face Jesus. He knew one day I'm going to face Jesus and he desires for you what I desire for you, that when your life is presented you don't have to go, "But I thought that was gold?" You see, we have written instructions we know because he said, "Follow me as I'm following Christ."

So why is this so important? I want to talk about a process that's mentioned all throughout scripture from the Old Testament into the New, Jesus even mentioned it specifically: you and I, whether you know it or not, you are currently in the process of being a sheep. You are. In fact, Isaiah 53:6 says, "All we like sheep have gone astray." It doesn't say other people are like sheep. It doesn't say these people are like sheep. It says all of us are like sheep. Now collectively speaking sheep are usually stinky and stupid but I'm going to be nicer than that this morning. Have you noticed something about sheep? They go nowhere on their own. They only go where they're led. They only arrive at a destination because they're following somebody who's leading and/or guiding them. In our context, parents, how many times have you heard this said to you and you've said to somebody else, "If your friends all jumped off a cliff, would you jump too?" That's that sheep mentality. You don't believe that humanity is sheep? Then why is it that national championship games, Super Bowls, World Series, NBA championship, fill in the blank, why is it that right now in our culture for 30 seconds of commercial airtime they'll pay millions of dollars? Why? Because they know you're watching that game, you're content, life is good, but three hours later you're hungry for chips and salsa and you need a new truck. [laughter] Now if you're watching the Hallmark Channel, it's a whole different set of products but nonetheless... [laughter]

Why do they pay millions of dollars? Because they know you're a sheep and they know I'm a sheep, and we never entertained those ideas until they present them before us

because what humanity has a tendency to do is we follow either the loudest or the most frequent voice that is given to us. That's why Jesus said in John 10, he said, "I am the Good Shepherd." That's why the Apostle Paul said in Acts 20:29, he said, "Listen to what I'm saying because the grievous wolves are coming in." That's why we began in 1 Corinthians 11, "Follow me. Don't listen to the other voices."

So let's talk about the persons. You do realize, whether you admit it or not, right now you're following somebody. For those of you that have social media accounts, you're following a whole lot of people, right? But you don't have to be on social media. In fact, you could be old school. You say, "I'm so old school I still watch the nightly news." Fine. How do you know what's true and what's not? You're following a voice on your tv screen. Baaa. We're sheep, aren't we? You say, "I'm more old school than that. I still get and I read the paper." Baa. There's a columnist, isn't there? In other words, the information we receive, the data that we compile, the stuff that will influence our decision rarely if ever is concocted within our own two ears. We have other people that are speaking and communicating and influencing us on everything from what we eat to what we purchase, to what we believe about issues that are much more serious than even chips and salsa.

So what does the Apostle Paul say in light of all that? "Follow me. Let my voice be above all those other voices. May my words supersede all those others." Can we talk about the product for just a moment? You say, "The product?" 2 Corinthians 5:10, I want you to hear what the Apostle Paul says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." Again, let me designate some things. All means everybody. Must means you can't get out of it. One day every single one of us, we must appear before Jesus. We're going to give an account, we're going to give a defense, we're going to debate, whatever thing you can imagine of it, but here's the thing I want you to very clearly as we enter this new year and this new season of life: there has yet to be nor will there ever be someone who defends, justifies or rationalizes their decision or behavior based to God himself, "Well, somebody told me I ought to do it. Somebody told me it was okay. Well, according to the latest polls, that's what everybody is in support of. God, you don't understand, that's how I felt." He'll say, "Well, what did I say?" You see, in 1 Corinthians 11, the Apostle Paul makes it real clear. He said, "If you want to know how to do this thing called life, look at what I've done, listen to the words that God's given me to you, and do them."

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe today even as we hear a message, a challenge before us as believers to live the life God has called us to rather than the life that maybe others are trying to convince us of, can I share with you some other words of the Apostle Paul? In Romans 10:13 he said whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. We live in a world today where some people say just call on who you want to call, as long as you're faithful, as long as you're fervent, it doesn't matter what you believe. What did Paul say? He said there is no other salvation other than Christ Jesus. In fact, in the book of Romans 6, he said the wages of our sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Maybe today, maybe you're that individual here in person, maybe you're watching online, maybe you're even listening on

the radio, maybe you're one of those persons today who said, "You know, I've just kind of done it my own way or I've listened to these voices or those voices." Maybe today you would ask yourself, "Well, what did the Lord tell me to do through the Apostle Paul? He told me that if I believed on him, I would be saved."

If you're that person today as we began our service with Jesus saves, let me encourage you just to call out to the Lord. You don't have to do so out loud. You don't have to say the same words that maybe I or somebody else would say. It's not about the word order and the sentence structure and the checking off of a box, it's about a heart's cry that says, "God, I've got a sin problem that only Jesus can fix." Let me remind you before we walk through this that the Apostle Paul called on Jesus to save him and he told us to do it his way, so maybe today is the day you call on Jesus as well. Maybe your heart's cry would go something like this. "God, today I confess I've got a sin problem. God, I've been places I should have never been. God, I've done things I should have never done. I've spoken words that should have never left my lips. God, your word says that because of that I have sinned, I have transgressed, I have trespassed your law and, God, I stand condemned, I deserve the death that Romans 6:23 talks about, but also, God, I believe in the grace of Jesus Christ. God, today I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to come on my behalf. God, I believe he loved me so much he was willing to live a sinless life, rejecting all forms of temptation. And God, I believe he died a sacrificial death. God, today I believe that when they nailed him to the cross that it was my sin, my transgression that held him there. God, I believe he paid the price and the punishment for my sin. And God, today I believe that as we've sung numerous times today that when he rose from the grave he made it possible for my sin to be forgiven and my soul to be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to all the issues, the struggles and the problems of this life, but I do know that the only one who can save me from my sin is Jesus Christ. So God, today I'm doing what the Apostle Paul did, I'm following his footsteps, I'm asking Jesus to save me. In the best way I know how, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're here for the first time, maybe you've spent the majority of your life here, in just a moment I'm going to pray for us and we're going to stand and sing and when we do so, maybe you're that person who cried out to Jesus today and I want to invite you just to step out and step forward. We've got a whole team set aside. We've got a room set aside to give you the time that you need. We just want to hear what God is doing. We want to pray with you and we want to pray for you. Maybe today you're that person who made that first time decision, or maybe as we discussed from Acts 9, you've never followed in believer's baptism, or maybe today you say, "Do you know what? It's a new year, it's a fresh start, the Lord has called us to be a part of this incredible body of believers." Whatever the decision, we welcome you this morning.

*Lord Jesus, as we come to this time, God, thank you that as we sang "Jesus saves" you're still in the saving business. God, thank you that you're still forgiving, that, God, you're still redeeming, you're still reconciling, you're still restoring, that, God, today we would have the privilege of you moving and acting in our lives. God, how humbling it is that in*

*spite of who we are and what we've done, the sheep that your word says we are, that you, the Shepherd, were willing to lay down your life for us. Today, may we respond appropriately. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*