

1 Corinthians 9:23-27 NASB

“Winning the New Year’s prize”

“I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.

²⁴Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.

“²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; ²⁷ but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.”



Purposeful living usually brings rewards.

But one prize only is worth aiming for in life.

Are you focused on receiving that prize?

In the 1980s, a musical combo known as the Alan Parsons Project featured a song entitled, “Days Are Numbers.”

The lyrics stated:

“The traveler is always leaving town.
He never has the time to turn around.
And if the road he’s taken isn’t leading
anywhere,
He seems to be completely unaware.”

Professor William James said:

“The greatest use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it.”

Do you spend your energy and money on things that will outlast you?

Many folks plod along—happy if they can get through another day.

They stay active, but most of their real purpose vanished long ago.

Someone described this type on the Internet in:

“THE TOTAL MAN – ALMOST.”

He brushed his teeth twice a day,
with the right brand of toothpaste.
The doctors examined him twice a year.

He wore his boots when it rained.
He slept with the windows open for fresh air.
He stuck to a diet with plenty of fresh vegetables.
He relinquished his tonsils, and traded in several worn-out glands.
He golfed – but never more than 18 holes in one day.
He got at least eight hours of sleep every night.
He never smoked nor drank, nor lost his temper.
He did his “daily dozen” every day.
He was all set to live to be a hundred years old.
The funeral will be next Wednesday.

He is survived by eighteen specialists, four health institutes, six gyms, and numerous manufacturers of health foods and antiseptics.

He made one mistake. HE FORGOT GOD.

Our text reveals Paul, the Apostle’s life purpose: “I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.”

Paul lived for the “sake of the gospel.”

What did Paul mean: “the gospel”?

Gospel is an Old English-Middle English term that originally meant Good News.

Sadly now, the word *Gospel* doesn’t suggest its original full, happy message.

The Gospel is like a really great person whose enemies have called lots of undeserved names.

What good news does the Gospel tell?

Begin with the great news that God created the heavens and the earth—plants, animals, and people, (Genesis 1 & 2).

Life did not come about accidentally.

God created all life and gave all life purpose.



As Genesis 1:1 states, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

Why does that matter?

Without the truth of, “In the beginning, God

created the heavens and the earth,” life means no more than the little bits of momentary joy.

Darwinist George Gaylord Simpson said that, “Man is the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind.”

Notice that Darwinist Simpson used the expression “natural process.”

Dictionaries define *process* as “a systematic series of actions directed to some end.”

Stating that man is the result of a “purposeless . . . process” is a contradiction in terms.

If it’s purposeless--has no particular end—how can it be a natural process?

Stephen Jay Gould was a non-believing evolutionist who taught biology, geology and the history of science at Harvard.

In “Natural Science Magazine,” Gould compared the development of life on earth to water dropping randomly on a hillside.

As water drops, it carves valleys and rivulets. Gould held that by the same randomness, life could have developed differently or not at all.

Gould wrote:

“If the metaphor of the landscape is valid, with all its randomness and unpredictability, then I think we must conclude that the earth need never have evolved its complex life.”

The dropping of water is not a random process. Water dropping on a hillside will follow fixed principles of gravity, evaporation, and other physical laws God established in the beginning.

I don’t know all the processes God used in developing life or how long He took.

I firmly believe though, that, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

And that the

“The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground,” Genesis 2:2 NIV.

For what objective should all human life strive?

Above all, our purpose is to acknowledge, honor, and live by the commands our creator gave us.

Too few people honor God.

They want to do things their way.

They prefer a god that fits their image.

They refuse to honor the only true God, who created them or to follow His commands.

God designed us and the entire Universe.

In His word, God tells us what’s best for us.

Failing to serve God our Creator negatively affects us and society.

The more we follow our own ways, the angrier, lonelier, and more stressed we become.

Think of all the federal, state, county, city, professional, and religious agencies that have been established to help people cope.

Prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, counseling, and therapies are supposed to make people manage, to feel better—to deal with stress.

Few of these *therapies* deal with the cause of stress.

Why do folks struggle to cope?

Why do they suffer such stress?

Why so much mental anguish?



Here’s one of the chief causes.

Long ago, many decided that religious leaders used guilt to dominate and control people.

That might have been true in some cases.

Now that skeptics have eliminated guilt from the minds of most people, guess who profits?

Drug companies, therapists, illicit drug dealers, the media, and entertainers richly profit.

Few seem to understand why folks are increasingly stressed and experiencing mental anguish.

For decades, many leaders have contended that right and wrong do not exist except as defined by them and certain elite people in society, e.g. entertainers, and the media.

“If you have love in your heart, and if you feel good about it, it must be OK. “Just do it!””

For the sake of illustration—grant that right and wrong do exist as the Bible says.

Let’s say further that every time you commit wrong, you get a small rock to carry.

No problem.

You are young and strong.

Unless it’s in your shoe, your eye, or your salad, a pebble’s presence is minor.



As time goes by, you do other things wrong and your pebble collection increases.

After a while, your pebble sack gets heavy.

Your load gets weightier.

You chafe with your burden.

It becomes hard, even painful to carry.

You ask others about it, but they don’t even recognize your heavy pebble load.

Do you know why they don’t?

They have theirs, too, and they think it’s just normal--everybody struggles.

Friends recommend some pills to help you deal with the pain and stress.

The drugs work for a while, but then you need stronger drugs and drinks.

Your stress increases.

Your pebble sack becomes enormous and your depression compounds.

Large segments of society need legal uppers and downers, counseling, and therapy to cope and deal with stress—to manage life.

No one seems to understand that if we got rid of these huge burdens and loads we’d cope better and could live more freely.

The burden I’m talking about is guilt.

God built guilt into our consciences to tell us that we’re doing something wrong.

In the same way that pain tells you that you have a pebble in your shoe, your conscience tells your psyche and body that you are doing wrong.

Genesis 4 tells of the sacrifices Cain and Abel offered God.

Cain apparently gave a pilfering to God.

Abel gave his first and best.

Abel’s offering pleased the Lord; Cain’s didn’t.

“Why are you so angry?” the LORD asked Cain. “Why do you look so dejected? You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master,”

Genesis 4:6, 7 NLT.

The Lord told Cain that to lift his depression, he needed only to do right. Rather than to change and do right, Cain resented and hated his brother.

Note what the Lord told Cain:

“If you refuse to do what is right, then watch out!
Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you.”

Drugs deaden the pain that consciences bring.

People have known that for centuries.

That’s why guys give alcohol or pills to their dates—they want their date’s conscience weakened.

Sedatives work, of course—temporarily.

But as guilt pebbles increase, they stress us.

Stress often leads to depression.

Stress is a vicious, costly killer in our country.
Few people consider guilt as a major cause of stress.

High paid experts try to tell us how to lessen stress.

They will likely not mention guilt that comes from doing wrong as the Bible defines it.

The neglected factor guilt is taking a horrible toll on individuals in our society.

God designed us to do right and to live right.

Every time we do wrong, guilt weighs on us.

When we don’t resolve guilt, we feel mental anguish, and we wonder what’s wrong.

Eventually the load gets so heavy we feel depressed and stressed.

How do we rid ourselves of the load?

In one thing, the so-called experts are right.

We certainly need to exercise daily.

The Lord designed us to work.

If we don’t work physically for a living, we should arrange a way to exercise.

1) **The best way to reduce stress is to turn off the news and read God’s will, the *Bible*.**

How do we rid ourselves of guilt?

2) **We stop doing wrong.**

- **We tell the truth, and we stop hating.**
- **We control our anger and love our enemies.**
- **We quit sexual immorality.**

3) **We spend our lives regularly thanking God, and we follow the model of His son Jesus.**

“I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.”

The Good news: when we stop doing wrong, confess our sins, and become one with Christ, God cleanses us of all unrighteousness.

FORGIVEN

He puts us in fellowship with other forgiven people, and our heavy loads diminish.

May your New Year be filled with godliness and Jesus’ forgiving love!

By God’s grace in Christ, you’ll win the life-prize.