

"But I Discipline My Body And Make It My Slave"

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"But I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified." (1 Cor. 9:27)

Read 1 Cor. 9:24-27

"To what extent, how far do we go, how much are we willing to give, what are we willing to sacrifice to see the gospel preached to those who have never heard?" In the previous paragraph (9:1-23) Paul ends with this thought, "To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it (vv. 22, 23)."

Our present paragraph is a continuation of the thought begun earlier. Paul's passion was to preach Christ (1:17, 2:2) to those who had yet to hear. He would use whatever means possible to afford him this privilege. In the previous paragraph he speaks of "winning" his audience through the preaching of Christ (vv. 19, 20, 21, 22).

In verse 24 Paul's point is not that he is beating out the competition, but that he runs so that he might "win" the opportunity of preaching Christ to those who have yet to hear. We "run" in order that we might obtain an audience with a listening ear.

In the natural realm athletes exercise self-control in every area of life in order to receive an earthly wreath, but we are exhorted by Paul to exercise self-control in order that we might receive the heavenly wreath.

Many see such a "wreath" as that of hearing "well done my good and faithful slave" (Matt 25:21, 23) however, the context of Matthew 24 and 25 would warrant against such a pronouncement as being uncertain. Every believer will hear these words.

I would suggest that the wreath or prize is that of lives we were privileged to touch and see in heaven. This is the thought in First Thessalonians 2:19, "For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?" See also Second Corinthians 1:14, Philippians 2:16 and 4:1.

In verses 26 and 27 Paul lays out the nature of his self-control. His "course" is intentional and each "punch" is well placed and effective. The disciplining of his body is a strenuous word. It carries the idea of beating into submission, of standing over it as the victor. The word choice speaks of one who is a slave-driver. Such language as this is foreign to an over-indulgent society where every whim and desire is fulfilled, but Paul recognized the natural inclinations of our flesh and refused to become its slave.

Self-control as a verb is used only two times in the New Testament and both times by Paul (7:9 and here). The noun is used in Titus 1:8 of those in positions of leadership. It is the same word used in Galatians 5:22 to describe the fruit of the Spirit.

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The Spirit of God would have us live lives of personal discipline. Our expressions of personal discipline are the outward workings of His inward work. The longer I live the more I crave the discipline of material abstinence and diminishing of personal glory. In our perpetual motion and information clutter, it is the simplicity of faith that beckons us to come and sit at the feet of Jesus. But to do so demands that we engage in "spiritual spring cleaning." The simplicity of faith calls us to "deny ourselves, and take up our cross and follow Him (Mark 8:34)." Such speech sounds so foreign to our current culture, but such is the pathway that leads us to the very feet of Jesus. And it is the uncluttered focus, this self-discipline that opens before us the door of opportunity to preach Christ to those who have yet to hear.

Verse 27 ends with, "so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified." The word "disqualified" is used eight times in the New Testament and in every other occurrence it is translated "reprobate" in the Authorized Version (Rom. 1:28, 2 Cor. 13:5, 6, 7, 2 Tim. 3:8, Titus 1:16, Heb. 6:8). In every occurrence the idea of being "reprobate" is that of being unsaved, an unbeliever. Verse 27 seems to run parallel to verse 23.

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

There is no question that Paul recognized the need to finish well. It is possible to preach the Word of God and not be a participant in it. It is possible to preach life and still be dead. It is possible to offer water and still be thirsty. It is possible . . . but the tragedy of such a scenario is impossible to comprehend. Paul did not wish to be one who preached a message that had not yet laid hold of him. However, the context of our verse perhaps offers another perspective. Because of one's inability to live a life of self-control they disqualify themselves from being able to preach the gospel to specific groups of people. Through such actions they are disqualified and are no longer able to "become all things to all people that by all means they might save some (v. 22)."

As a fellowship, "let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:1, 2)."

It is from the overflow of sitting at His feet that we live the simplicity of our faith and this is what will attract the thirsty soul to the pure fountain of life that flows from Him.