

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

1 Cor. 9:24-27

Celebrating the Centrality of Christ in the Local Assembly

Chapter 9 is a part of the larger section that runs from chapter 8 through chapter 10. The entire passage is dealing with issues of liberty. By way of summary let us note the previous 23 verses.

First, Paul's apostolic right (vv. 1-14). In verses 1-14, Paul gives six reasons why he had the right to be supported by the churches to which he ministered.

Second, Paul's apostolic restraint (vv. 12, 15-18). Paul [limited] his liberties and rights for the sake of the gospel.

Third, Paul's apostolic freedom (vv. 19-23). He became all things to all men in order that he might win some.

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 our present passage we will note, Paul's apostolic exhortation and example (vv. 24-27). There are three primary thoughts inside of these four verses.

- I. We are to run with determination (v. 24)

Paul uses this same language in 2 Timothy 2:4, 5. We run to win. There is a goal or purpose behind why we do what we do. We are not simply "spinning our wheels." This verse invites us to ask two questions. **First** what is the prize and **secondly** what are we winning?

In order for us to answer those questions it is necessary for us to consider the idea of being disqualified in verse 27. 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.

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.

In this disqualification one will not win and thus not receive the prize. There are perhaps two ideas present in our text.

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

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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).”

Verse 24 assures us that “To win, it is not enough to run, it is needed to run *well*.” (Godet, First Corinthians, 472). 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.

II. We are to run with discipline (vv. 25-27a)

The culture that existed during this period of time was very familiar with the language used by the apostle. He uses “technical terms that were borrowed from the training of ancient athletes, which extended over a period of ten months.” It would be like us speaking of an Olympic athlete who sacrifices every area of his life to achieve the goal of not only participating, but winning.

A. What does it mean to exercise self-control (v. 25a)?

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. “The figure is intended to impress upon them that the goal, being eternal in nature, is of such value that it should affect the way they live in the present.”

B. The contrast between a perishable and imperishable wreath/crown (v. 25b).

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.

C. Do not waste your efforts (vv. 26, 27a)

The language used by the apostle speaks of direct and meaningful blows. Everything is intentional.

III. We are to run to avoid disqualification (v. 27b)

How sad it would be to come to the end of your life and to find that you lived without any thought for God.

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.