

"The Race That Counts"

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Date October 17th, 2021

INTRO: It's a race going on are you in it?

- Are you on your mark?
- Are you in your lane?
- Are you running for self?
- What is the prize?
- The prize is Christ
- You have been entered into the race now run

It is my prayer today that you see the call from God's Word to live in such a way that brings Him glory and honor no matter what.

CONTEXT:

- BOOK of 1 Corinthians
- Chapter 9 of 1st Corinthians (Sacrifice, Godliness, Eternity)
 - Discipleship
 - The Need for Self-Discipline
 - Imperishable Crown
 - Eternal Reward

Chapter 9 Summary

The apostle shows his authority and asserts his right to be maintained. (1-14) He waved this part of his Christian liberty, for the good of others. (15-23) He did all this, with care and diligence, in view of an unfading crown. (24-27)

- Paul an apostle called by God not by man.
- Established the church at Corinth and it was proof that God is working through him.
- Should be entitled to be supported by the church but takes nothing. Paul does not take advantage the church. Paul makes it known that this is the life given to him by Christ
- He gets to spread the gospel around free of charge to everyone.
- Paul might be free, but he's made himself into a slave to win more converts to Christ.
- Wherever he goes, he becomes like the people he's with so that he can help convince them that Jesus is Lord.
- Christians are like world-class athletes. They must train and be super disciplined/disciplined to win the prize at the end.

¹⁹ For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. ²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under [h]the Law, as under [i]the Law though not being myself under [j]the Law, so that I might win those who are under [k]the Law; ²¹ to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. ²² 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. ²³ I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.

(Run with me as Christ reveals to us the distance of the race.)

BIG IDEA:

Christ is our Imperishable prize.

First Prayer

TEXT: ²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. ²⁷ No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

PREVIEW:

1. READY
2. SET
3. GO
4. !

T/S: Run and press toward the upward call in Christ who is our Reward!

I. READY

Illustration:

At what age did you start running? How did your form look? Perhaps you did not care the only thing that mattered was you were moving and moving fast. I remember as a kid I would run all the time and I mean all the time. I would run against the kids in my neighborhood and as a kid those are bragging rights! "I'm the fastest kid on the block. When there was a race in the neighborhood everyone had to run no one was sitting out, you were mandated to run. This is the same for a Christian who received the miracle of salvation. Once we are born again, we are immediately running.

²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.

Isthmian games (The Corinthians were familiar with these games... second in prestige to the ancient Olympics.)

Explanation

- **"Do"** it means a call action. An act, duty, role, work.
- **"You"** it is used to refer to the person or people. Paul is addressing the church at Corinth (the Corinthians are the people from Corinth).
- **"All"** the whole church everyone is included. All means all.

- **"Runners"** messengers, those who are called. Those who have been chosen or given the opportunity to run.
- **"Prize"** a reward for victory or superiority, as in a contest or competition. Anything striven for, worth striving for, or much valued.
- **"Run"** in haste. Sometimes both feet are off the ground. Act quickly.
- Paul uses **metaphors** to get his point across to the church. **(Examples of runners, boxers, gladiators, chariot racers, and trophies.**
- Paul is asking a **rhetorical** question to make his point clear to the church in Corinth... His question is: do you know that in a race all runners run?

Paul encourages the church to run in **such** a way as to get the prize. The word **"Such"** to be **"of the kind, character, extent"**

Application

- This is a call to ALL Christians. Before you run salvation must come! Those who have been born again by Christ. (This is an invitation for you those who are being drawn

to fully surrender. This is for those who are maybe in a stumble REPENT and run back to Christ.

- **Psalm 119:32 "I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart."** The Lord gives us grace to run for Him. (Lord give us heart to run in your commandments and enlarge our hearts

The "Do" is a call to us (Christ's church) to run. **"Philippians 3:14 "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."**

- **Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength"** it's done in Christ.

We are the "You" - It is for you and for me. **God is speaking to us.**

- Will we run in such a way? We set ourselves apart just as Christ called us to. **1 Peter 1:16 "Because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."**
- These 12 distinctives are signs that a church is in the race and running for the prize. (Play distinctives video)

1. Responding to grace & repenting of sin...
2. Trusting the Bible & obeying God's Word...
3. Growing in-Christ & living Spirit-led...
4. Praying for guidance & following by faith...

5. Dying to self & carrying our cross...
6. BE-ing the Church & loving one another (truly loving one another)
7. Equipping the saints & exemplifying supernatural unity...
8. Ministering as ambassadors & discerning matters shrewdly...
9. Worshipping God vertically & experiencing Him horizontally...
10. Proclaiming the Gospel (no matter what) & fishing for men...
11. Making disciples-warriors & winning spiritual-warfare...
12. Loving our King & serving His kingdom

- We can all win the prize. If we run and not quit. (Talk about challenges that we may face)
- **James 1:12 "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love Him.**

II. SET

Illustration:

Think of an Olympic athlete.... they're in a league of their own. They master their craft and become the best in the world. They have strict training. I am sure they go to bed early, eat healthy and drink plenty of water. They exhaust their bodies to win gold. Leaving it all out there is an understatement. They train for years just to get a shot at the

Olympics and to be called the fastest or strongest in the entire world. The gold they so desperately want will lose its shine and eventually be no more.

²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

(New King James) ²⁵ And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.

Explanation:

- Look at **"Temperate"** showing moderation or self-restraint.

Those who ran in these games were kept to a spare diet. They used themselves to hardships. They practiced the exercises. And those who pursue the interests of their souls, must combat hard with fleshly lusts.

In verse ²² **Paul states "to the weak I become weak."** This is the attitude Paul wants the superior ones at Corinth, those who have "knowledge," to adopt toward the "weak" in their midst.

He sets before himself and them the danger of yielding to fleshly desires, pampering the body, and its lusts and appetites.

- a. An athlete must refuse things that may be fine in themselves but could strain him in the pursuit of his/her goals. Self-control is crucial.

Matthew 16:24-26 "Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"

Hebrew 12:1-2 "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, 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, ² [a]fixing our eyes on Jesus, the [b]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.

2 Timothy 2:1-6 "You therefore, my [a]son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ² The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. ³ Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. ⁵ Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he [b]does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶ The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops.

- b. **Being temperate helps guard against distractions. It brings awareness to the church that they/we must look to Christ at every turn because they/we could fall.**

- c. Paul is warning the Corinthians to refuse anything that would cause themselves or a weaker believer to fall. (They were eating the foods offered to false gods) having been warned to stay away because of the weaker believers present. Those who were stronger in their walk could hurt their witness to those who are weak.

Galatians 5:16 "But I say walk by the spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."

- **"Perishable"** likely to decay or go bad quickly. Paul is showing the church that the worldly pleasures, desires of the heart quickly fade. Those who competed in the games wanted a wreath a crown that would quickly fade.

Romans 6:12 "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts and passions."

- Look at how Paul encourages the church to set hearts on the **"imperishable crown"** **1 Peter 5:4 "And when the Chief Shepherd appears you will receive the unfading crown of glory"**
 - a. Only what is done in Christ will last.

Application:

- We must be temperate. **1 Corinthians 10:13** "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

Titus 1:8 "Be hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined."

- Fruits of the Spirit **Galatians 5:22-23** "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law."
- Is there anything in your life that may cause you, a brother or sister to stumble? Our witness (in the mirror and on the mission field) must be intentional in all that we do. The enemy will use anything to bring division in the house of God.

Romans 16:17-18 ¹⁷ "Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. ¹⁸ For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.
(Lord may it never be so here in this house"

- How important is the mission to you? We show it with our lives (Lord may we show the truth and love of the gospel of Jesus Christ!
- Are you running to be seen? Look in the gospel of Luke 18:10 the Pharisee got his reward..... he wanted everyone to see him. The tax collector knew he had no reward without Christ. Christ is the reward! He is the focal point of our worship. He helps us stay on the narrow way.

¹⁰ "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' ¹³ But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be [f]merciful to me, the sinner!' ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

- Imperishable crowns are given to those who persevere in the Christ. I want to warn you.... we ought not to be fixed on just the crown, but we ought to behold the One who gives the crown.

III. GO

Illustration:

Talk about Tom Hanks in the movie *Forest Gump* (He ran aimlessly)

Talk about Sylvester Stallone (*Rocky* his goal was to win the fight)

²⁶ Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air.

Explanation:

- **“Therefore”** for that reason Paul says he does the opposite of what the isthmian athlete does. In other words, Paul knows his why! He knows why he runs, and he doesn't run aimlessly but with a goal in mind. Paul knows he runs to glorify the risen Christ. Paul wants the gospel to be preached and he wants it preached without excuse.
- Paul makes it plain that he is intentional in his witness. Paul loves and cares about the glory of God! He also cares about the lost and saved souls.
- Paul now shifts the metaphor to a boxer. He doesn't beat the air like those who prepare for the games. He's saying Christians should never display such acts for that is not our warfare. Christ followers don't exercise in that manner, beating the air. Christians fight in SPIRITUAL hand-to-hand combat.

- Christians must fight, not as those that beat the air. Paul lets the church know that is not their way of fighting.

Application:

- Do you know why we fight? Do you know what you're fighting against?
- The bible tells us in **Ephesians 6:12** "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.
- Church we know how to train and fight. **We have been equipped by God.**
 - a. **Ephesians 6:10-20** "10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against [e]flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your

feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 [f]in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 [g]With all prayer and petition [h]pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, [i]be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, 19 and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in [j]chains; that [k]in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

b. 2 Peter 1:3 "Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.

- **We run and we do not retreat. Romans 8:31 "If God is for us, who can be against us."**
- **Romans 8:37 "But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us."**
- **John 3:36 "What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony."**

- **John 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not [i]obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."**
- **Hebrews 12:2 ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the [b]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.**

(Examples in the Bible of the people of God not retreating

- **Exodus 14 Egyptian pursuit of Israel**
- **Joshua 10 Battle of Gibeon**
- **1 Samuel 17 David and Goliath)**

These battles were won by God alone - through His people.

So will it be for us who put our trust in Christ. ALL our battles are won by Christ! That is good news for every Christian. (Lord may we know it is You who fights our battles THROUGH US Day in and day out.)

IV. ! (EXCLAMATION MARK)

27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Illustration:

“What do you think of those who would say: “Do as I say... not as I do?”

How much positive influence do those kinds of people have on you?

What would you say to a 600 lb. personal trainer that promised to help you lose weight and get into shape???

Walking your talk and Being a credible witness is a BIG deal...

Explanation:

- **Paul believes what he practices and practices what he believes. He uses himself as an example to follow. Controlling his flesh.**

- **Holman bible dictionary - “In the Bible, discipline has a positive and essential place in the lives of God's people. God had prescribed a way of life for His people. They had to learn how to be obedient. The process by which God's people learned obedience was the “discipline of the Lord”**

- **“Discipline” = direction, order, authority, a firm hand.**

- **Ephesians 1:22-23 “And He put all things in subjection under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”**

- Paul is making a statement to the church: "This what it takes!" There aren't any short cuts if you are in Christ, you will be sanctified. Will it feel good? No but Christ walks with us through it.
- **"Disqualified"** declared ineligible for an office, activity, or competition because of an offense or infringement. (Not approved, not standing the test)
- Paul's is not talking about physically beating his body. He is referencing the previous verses and by the physical demands of his apostolic work.
- Paul endures physical and emotional hardships just like the athlete goes through, to attain the goal of victory. Paul was willing to give up his material support, for the advancement of the gospel.

(Lord may we give everything, every fleshly impulse; we don't want it keeping us from winning souls to Christ.)

Application:

- Verse 27 is extreme and very necessary for us to practice and live out. How important are those who you congregate with? How badly do you want to see them walking with Lord? We cannot let anything stop us from preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- This passage is very personal to the church today. So many professing Christians don't even consider their brother or sister.

- **How and in what way?** Many churches around the world have an "it's all about me" sinful attitude and focus. It's all about me when I sing, it's all about me when we gather, it's all about me because I'm the pastor.... So many churches are teaching wrong because they have been taught wrong. They don't truly seek out what the Word of God says.

- "Make disciples" - that is what Jesus commands His church to do. Why aren't churches making biblical, God-honoring disciples?
ANSWER: There are several reasons:
 - a. Because they don't know what Jesus really said.
 - b. They don't care about what Jesus really said.
 - c. They have given up on what Jesus really said.
 - d. They are trying to blend & balance by mixing the world into their walk and witness.
 - e. They are giving in to fear vs. walking by faith.
 - f. They are led by false teachers & wolves in sheep's clothing.
 - g. There are countless symptoms of unbelief & disobedience
 - h. Remember: the fruit reveals the root, and the root controls the fruit... Jesus said: "You will know them by their fruit..."
 - i. Have we given Christ everything? Have we thrown our hands up in total surrender?

- We get to partake in sharing the gospel.... let us do so in truth, love, zeal, and passion. The good news is that Christ came to save sinners and He died for depraved people like you and me. We must champion the gospel with Christlikeness...

- Christ is the reason we run! He is our eternal reward. If Christ isn't your eternal reward I pray right now that changes and you would run after Him!

- He rewards those who seek Him. (Lord I pray that You would cause those who have stopped running to start running again. Even more, I pray that you will give them strength and endurance so that they will not grow weary.

- May we not grow weary in doing good.

Lord it's in Jesus' name I pray, amen!