

1Co16 – Run The Race to Win! – 1 Corinthians 9:24-10:13

Pastor Dave Shepardson Calvary Chapel Nuevo / www.wordbymail.com

Open your Bibles. Title of the message, “Run The Race to Win!” 1 Corinthians 9:24 through Chapter 10 verse 13. We are going into the next chapter simply because the Bible wasn’t written in chapters or verses. And the subject flows from Chapter 9 into Chapter 10.

1Corinthians is not an easy book to study or teach. Some texts here – we approach with “less enthusiasm.” But not this text. This is wonderful, awesome, encouraging text. It’s perfect for me (personally) at *this* time in my life and it’s perfect for our church at *this* time in Church life.

There is a huge need in the Christian life for us to fully commit to “Run The Race to Win!” And that is the simple and life changing message of these verses. No half-hearted, one foot in runners. If we are *in* this race, then let’s be *in it to win it!* That is simply what our text is saying to us today.

Let’s pray. *Lord, we need this inspiration. WE need this encouragement. We need, maybe a little exhortation. We need to be prodded, Lord. We need to be fired up and inspired. And so Lord, allow us to receive your Word just as you wrote it today. Encourage the Church. Strengthen the Church and strengthen us personally to run the race to win. For your glory, Jesus, and in your name, amen.*

This text is kind of a “subject within a subject” (which is not uncommon for Paul). The context of us “sacrificing our rights” for the good of the Gospel and others around us goes from Chapter 8 through the end of Chapter 10. So we are in the middle of that context.

But today, in these verses, the Lord wants to encourage us regarding what it takes to stay in the race for the long run, which includes “staying in the race” of sacrificing our rights for the Gospel and the people around us.

And so Paul stops right in the middle of that subject and says very clearly – we must “Run This Race to Win!” We’ve got to follow hard after Christ until the end. We’ve got to continue to run the race until we have won. And to do that we have got to make sure that we will not be disqualified from running the race before the finish line.

Now, before we begin the text it’s important to make one thing clear. We *are* talking about our own effort here. We’re talking about real work in order to continue to run the race to win. And so we cannot be talking about salvation (and we are not). Because

salvation is not accomplished by our own effort, we don't earn it, we don't work for it. We "work it out" and that takes the commitment we're talking about today. Paul is not talking about salvation (that's *not* the context). He's talking about following Christ well, for the long run and we'll address that again in a minute. But I wanted to make that clear right up front.

Are you ready to run the race to win?

1 Corinthians 9:24 (NLT)

24 Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!

In this race that we're in, we have got to learn to run to win!

Even though many in church are familiar with "running the race" it doesn't seem that we fully embrace the difficulty and the perseverance and the discipline it takes to actually run to win.

If you are (or have been) a runner – especially long distance – you understand better than the rest of us what it takes to actually run to win a long distance race. But unfortunately, I think many in the overall church today view their life with Christ as more of a long distance "being taken care of by God" situation.

In general I don't think we really *like* the idea that to follow Jesus Christ *well* requires the discipline and the training of a winning athlete. But that is exactly *how* Paul sees it and *not* just in these verses, but throughout the New Testament.

So, after saying "we must run to win" in verse 24 Paul illustrates what he means in the next three verses.

1 Corinthians 9:25 (NLT)

25 All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize.

All Athletes (who are Running to WIN) are disciplined in their training . . .

When you see an athlete in training for a race they want to win, it is some serious business. They change everything that needs to be changed in order to prepare them to *run to win*. Anything that stands in the way, *they eliminate it* and they focus all their time and effort on doing what needs to be done in order for them to be able to *run to win*.

I've seen some marathon race starting lines and (at times) I've noticed three distinct types of people at the starting line.

There are the people who are *running to win*.

There are people *hoping to finish*.

There are people *just messing around*.

And for the *just messing around* people, maybe they just want to *look* like a runner. Maybe they just want to be *seen with* the runners. Maybe they're just *playing around* starting the race with the hat that holds two beer cans with a drinking tube into their mouth.

The Lord says (through Paul) Do not be that guy! Don't follow Christ to *look* like a runner or to be *seen with* other runners. And the Lord says, don't run just hoping to finish. Because just hoping to finish gives you the mindset of quitting the race when the race gets hard and you *can't* start the race like that. We must prepare (in every way) to *Run To Win!* Just like the winning athletes prepare to *run to win*.

And look again at the immeasurable difference between what we are running for compared to what those athletes are running for.

Again 1 Corinthians 9:25(b) says,

1 Corinthians 9:25(b)

25. . . They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize.

To the athlete we would say, seriously? You're going through all that disciplined training and extreme effort to win a wreath of leaves around your head and fifteen minutes of fame? That seems like a lot of work for a prize that will fade away.

But we are running to win
for an *eternal prize*
an *eternal reward*.

The discipline, the training, the commitment that we put into following hard after Christ will bring an everlasting reward! Not a letterman's jacket that you can't fit into five years after you have won it.

And Paul says *because* I am running to *win* an *eternal prize*. He says in 1 Corinthians 9:26,

1 Corinthians 9:26 (NLT)

26 So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing.

I run with *purpose* in every step. I'm *not* just messing around! I'm not *lollygagging*. I'm not *shadowboxing*. I'm running this race with an *eternal purpose* because at the finish line there is an *eternal reward!!*

And so in 1 Corinthians 9:27(a) Paul says,

1 Corinthians 9:27(a) (NLT)

27 I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should . . .

The word *body* (SOMA) is the word used to refer to the *complete person* – all that you are – body, mind, spirit.

Just like in Romans 12:1 where we're called to present our bodies as a living sacrifice (same word) it means "present *all* that you *are*," everything that makes up you. And here Paul says, I discipline *all* that I am – like an athlete – training myself to *do what I should* (note that).

And let me try to clear up one possible misunderstanding. There are plenty of places in scripture where we are called to "give up" or "surrender" something in our lives. And Paul is talking here about us "disciplining you" – training yourself – to *do that when that* is what is *what is required*. Notice again Paul says (in NLT) ***I am training myself TO DO what I should*** – (great translation).

This discipline and this training is *not* to earn something in and of itself. This discipline and training is what it takes in order to *do* what God calls us to *do* in every area of life.

Including – Giving Up what *needs* to be Given Up.

Surrendering what *needs* to be surrendered

Rolling burdens to God that *need* to be rolled to him, etc.

Paul says I'm training my body to give up what I need to give up.

We have a whole series called "Give UP" and it's one of my favorite series. It's about surrendering everything to the Lord. Just give up, man. Just give it over to the Lord and give in to his will. Surrender to him. It's a very personal series, for me.

And Paul says, listen, I train my body to give up what I need to give up. In fact his teaching is right in the middle of us *giving up* our *own rights* for the good of the Gospel.

And Paul is saying you've got to be disciplined, and train, and *run to win* in order to "sacrifice your rights" when God calls you to do that.

Do we get it? Does that make sense? Paul says I train my body to do what it should to transform and conform me into the image of the Lord.

As always the battle is between the *spirit* and the *flesh*. Our life with Christ, the race that we run with Christ, is all about the battle between the flesh and the spirit.

Galatians 5:17 (NLT)

17 . . . These two forces (Spirit & Flesh) are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.

And Paul is saying – if you *want* the spirit to *overcome* the flesh, it is going to take some serious commitment – *and effort*. You are going to have to make an all-in commitment to *run this race to win* no matter what!

No we *know* only the power of the Holy Spirit can overcome the strength of our flesh. But have you ever known a Christian who *has* the power of the Holy Spirit but is *constantly* taken out by the power of their flesh.

But have you ever known a Christian who has the power of the Holy Spirit but is constantly taken out by the power of their flesh? They have the full power of the Holy Spirit if they're a believer, if they've received Christ, Christ came with the Holy Spirit, Christ sent the Holy Spirit, and they need to pray for more power and continue praying as Jesus says in Luke 11. But they have the power.

It's because your obedience – your choices – trigger the power of the Holy Spirit in your life.

You flip the power switch by your obedience, by your choice. It is possible to have the power of the Holy Spirit in your life and *never*, ever experience it. And these verses are talking about what it takes to trigger that Holy Spirit power in order for us to *do* what we need to do in order to run this race to win.

There is a determination required to choose the power and direction of the Holy Spirit to keep us following hard after Jesus *all the way* to the finish line.

And then the *scariest* sentence in the text comes.

1 Corinthians 9:27(B) (NLT)

27 . . . Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.

This is what causes the “Salvation Question.” Is Paul saying he might lose his salvation? NO – we don’t believe so – and most Bible scholars feel the same way.

Again, the context here is not salvation. It’s exhortation to *Run the Race Well* and we interpret individual words *within the context* they are written in just as you and I do when we talk.

In verse 25 Paul says – we run – for an eternal prize. In fact the NIV translates this last sentence – *so that I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*

But I believe Paul is worried about being disqualified from something even more personal than the eternal reward.

Most scholars believe Paul is referring to being disqualified from serving the Lord – being taken out of running the race for Jesus. I believe Paul would be most afraid of losing his usefulness to the Lord, of being set aside by God in this great work of God’s Kingdom.

But certainly the *worst* thing it could mean would be a reference to those that Jesus was speaking of in Matthew 7:21.

Matthew 7:21 (NLT)

21 “Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter.

This is certainly the highest form of being disqualified.

And then this encouragement for us to be determined and disciplined *all the way* to the finish line makes Paul think of a million of his ancestors – in the desert. And so, (as Chapter 10 opens) Paul is going to list the *incredible blessings* the Israelites lived in at their deliverance from Egypt. And then he’s going to list the *radical judgment* they brought on themselves even though they were God’s People of Blessing.

1 Corinthians 10:1-5 (NLT)

1 I don’t want you to forget, dear brothers and sisters, about our ancestors in the wilderness long ago. All of them were guided by a cloud that moved ahead of them, and all of them walked through the sea on dry ground.

2 In the cloud and in the sea, all of them were baptized (identified) as followers of Moses.

3 All of them ate the same spiritual food,

4 and all of them drank the same spiritual water. For they drank from the spiritual rock that traveled with them, and that rock was Christ.

This is a short list of the spiritual blessing the People of God lived in while they were in the Wilderness after their “salvation” from Egypt.

- 1) They were ALL guided by the Cloud – which was the Presence of God
- 2) They all walked thru the Red Sea on dry ground – meaning they experienced the miracle power of God in their lives
- 3) They were all baptized as followers of Moses – (Baptizo) – meaning they were all identified with Moses (who was a ‘type’ of Christ)
- 4) They ALL ate the same spiritual food – referring to the manna from Heaven – which Jesus says in John 6 – was a picture of HIMSELF
- 5) They ALL drank the same spiritual water that came from the Rock that WAS Jesus Christ

And he’s saying – in a way- they had all the same (or at least similar) blessings as we have.

And then he says in 1 Corinthians 10:5,

1 Corinthians 10:5 (NLT)

5 Yet God was not pleased with most of them, and their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

In one of the biggest *understatements* in the Bible – verse 5 says God was not pleased with *most* of them. Of all the adult males in the Nation of Israel exactly how many was God pleased with? A total of two!

Two – out of 600,000 (the best we can tell). Their names were Joshua and Caleb. And they were the *only* two adult males the Lord was pleased with in the entire nation of Israel during this time because they were the only two who finished their race. They were the *only two* who kept the faith. They were the *only two* who completely followed the Lord all the way *into* the Promised Land. And for the rest with whom God was not pleased ... ***Their Bodies were scattered in the wilderness.***

I think that makes a pretty graphic point about how committed we must be to running this race to win. All of Israel was running the race – to some extent – but only two of the adult males were running to win.

And now, just as Paul listed five blessings that Israel had in the race, he now lists 5 things that took them out, that disqualified them from running to win.

But first, Paul connects what happened to them to *our lives*.

1 Corinthians 10:6 (NLT)

6 These things happened as a warning to us, so that we would not crave evil things as they did,

Sometimes the Bible is clearer than we want it to be... ***These things happened as a warning to us...***

And then we get the *first* thing that prevented Israel from running to win... ***They craved “evil things.”***

Referring to the “ways of Egypt” the people left behind, they constantly wanted to go back to Egypt and constantly were looking back on the things of the world with *fondness*. They craved the things of the world that God had saved them from and it disqualified them from *Running To Win*.

The *second* is in 1 Corinthians 10:17.

1 Corinthians 10:7 (NLT)

7 or (that we would not) worship idols as some of them did. As the Scriptures say, “The people celebrated with feasting and drinking, and they indulged in pagan revelry.”

This is a reference to the golden calf event at Mt. Sinai where the people got tired of waiting for Moses so they fashioned up an idol and had a big party to worship it... and their idol worship disqualified them from *Running to Win*.

The *third* is in 1 Corinthians 10:8.

1 Corinthians 10:8 (NLT)

8 And we must not engage in sexual immorality as some of them did, causing 23,000 of them to die in one day.

There are more people in the church every year who refuse to see that sexual immorality disqualifies you from running the race. For Israel – as a warning to us – ***23,000 died in one day*** in response to the choosing sexual immorality over *Running the Race to Win*.

Then the *fourth* is in 1 Corinthians 10:9.

1 Corinthians 10:9 (NLT)

9 Nor should we put Christ to the test, as some of them did and then died from snakebites.

This a reference to an event in Numbers 21 – when the people were complaining in unbelief – against Moses and God sent poisonous snakes to “correct” them, and then Jesus used this same event to refer to himself in John Chapter 3. Complaining in unbelief led to being “disqualified” from the race by a poisonous snake bite.

Finally the *fifth* warning is in 1 Corinthians 10:10.

1 Corinthians 10:10 (NLT)

10 And don't grumble as some of them did, and then were destroyed by the angel of death.

Final example – the Rebellion of KORAH (Numbers 16) where a group of priests formed a rebellion against Moses and they were disqualified from running their race because the earth opened up and swallowed them.

And finally, in classic Pauline preaching *overkill* (literally) we read in 1 Corinthians 10:11.

1 Corinthians 10:11 (NLT)

11 These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age.

Have you ever wondered *why* these radical things happened to those who turned away from the Lord – or rebelled against him?

These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age.

Paul started today with some “straight forward encouragement” that we would run the race to win and that we would put everything we have into it.

Then he made it come alive with these incredible examples from the real world history of God's *chosen people* as if to say, if you think you're safe, *don't be so sure*. If you think nothing like that could ever happen to you, *don't be so sure*.

In fact, Paul seems to be saying the more comfortable you are the more careful you ought to be in order *not to be disqualified*.

And in the next verse that is exactly what he says.

1 Corinthians 10:12 (NLT)

12 If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall.

On the heels of those radical warnings, the person who comes to Paul's mind is the spiritually self-confident and to the spiritually self-confident the Lord says in verse 12 ***If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall.***

And then we come to the final verse in this encouragement for us to "Keep Running This Race TO WIN!"

This is a famous verse, but seldom used in its full context. Today you see the full context this verse was written in. The context is running the race to win – it's staying strong, being disciplined, persevering and making yourself ready to do what it takes to not be disqualified before you reach the finish line.

To close, the Lord promises this in 1 Corinthians 10:13.

1 Corinthians 10:13 (NLT)

13 The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.

GOD is Faithful – He will make *us ready* for whatever tempts us to *disqualify* ourselves in this RACE of eternal proportions.

God will **Make US Ready**

God will **Give US Sufficient Power** (in the Holy Spirit)

God will **SHOW US a Way Out** so that WE can Endure

AND THEN. . . God will WAIT – to see if WE will put in

The **COMMITMENT**

The **DETERMINATION**

The **PERSEVERANCE**. . .

To TAKE the way OUT that God has provided

To MAKE the hard choice

To TAKE the necessary ACTION . . .

That will keep us - **IN THE RACE**. . .
and **NOT JUST**- in the race
But – keep us **RUNNING THE RACE TO WIN!**

Let's pray. *Jesus, every time we've been on the precipice of being disqualified, you have saved us. But God, we recognize that we have a role. We recognize that even if we can't do the math, we recognize that we have got to come to these moments – all in, trained up, sacrificially ready to continue to follow you Lord. Give us the commitment to run the race to the finish line no matter what. Give us the strength to make the choices to not be disqualified and instead to continue to serve you until the day we see you face to face. Lord, we want to be all in. And Lord, we're not worried about our salvation, for those of us who are saved today, we're settled. That issue is settled. Now we want to serve you. We want to serve you with all we have. We want to hear you say, "Well done good and faithful servant." That's it. After all you've done for us, Jesus; we want to live for you – all in and all the way to the finish line. We need your strength to do that. Fill us. Fill us with your Holy Spirit today and give us the strength to run to win. We thank you for it. For your glory and in your name, amen.*