

ENEMIES OF THE SOUL (Part 3)

1 Peter 2:11

11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;

According to this verse, our fleshly lusts “war against” (are an enemy to) the soul. Therefore, we might say that the real enemy is IN-A-ME, or in our bodies!

1 Corinthians 9:27

27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Apparently, Paul also sees our *bodies* as a threat. Therefore, he says that he must “keep under his body,” meaning buffet and beat it into subjection! While this statement requires some unpacking, I want us to go back a few verses because Paul brings up something very important in verse 24.

1 Corinthians 9:24

24 Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

Notice, although ALL run in a race, only ONE receives the prize. That’s very different from what we see today. It seems everyone receives a prize just for participating. For example, if a child competes in a sporting event they will receive a prize just for participating. While this might work with children, it doesn’t work well in life! Paul says that even though ALL run in a race (actively on a journey to find God), not everyone will obtain what they are searching for. In fact, Paul says that only ONE will receive the prize!

Now, I don’t believe that Paul is saying only one *person* will receive the prize. Instead, I believe he’s saying only one *kind* of person will receive the prize. What kind of person might that be? That would depend on what the prize is.

Philippians 3:14

14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul is again talking about obtaining the *prize*. Only this time he tells us what the prize is—the high calling of God *in Christ Jesus*. Therefore, the prize is in Christ. In fact, the prize IS Christ!

Philippians 3:8

⁸ Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

Notice, Paul is not just seeking knowledge about Christ. He wants to win CHRIST! (The reason he mentions the ‘knowledge of Christ’ is because we receive Christ by receiving His knowledge!)

Philippians 3:9

⁹ And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

The reason some people will never obtain the prize (or what they are seeking for) is because they’re seeking it apart from Christ! Then, there’s another group that won’t obtain the prize because they are trying to seek their own righteousness. While they may acknowledge Christ, they’re not looking to him for righteousness.

Romans 10:1–4

¹ Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. ² For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. ³ For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. ⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

Anyone trying to obtain the righteousness apart from faith in Christ is rebelling against God. They are trying to establish righteousness on their own terms!

Finally, there’s a group that’s not obtaining the prize. And it’s *not* because they are trying to seek the prize apart from Christ, nor is it because they are trying to establish their own righteousness. The reason this group is not obtaining the prize is because they’re trying to do it without losing!

Philippians 3:10–11

***¹⁰ That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;
¹¹ If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.***

Notice, Paul doesn’t just want to know Christ in resurrection, he also wants to know Him in suffering and in death! This is what it takes to gain the prize—to suffer the death of self. You cannot obtain life in the kingdom unless you’re willing to lose your life. Moreover, you must be conformed to His death! We can’t just pretend that we’re dying to self.

1 Corinthians 9:27

27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Paul understood that unless he “kept under his body” (i.e. buffeted his body), he would be a castaway and not receive the prize! Now, when Paul talks about “buffeting his body” we must understand that he’s not simply talking about suffering in his physical body. He’s really talking about suffering in his FLESH.

1 Peter 4:1

1 Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin;

Suffering in the flesh is not necessarily physical suffering. We suffer in the flesh whenever we refuse to give the flesh what it wants!

1 Peter 4:2 KJV

2 That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.

1 Corinthians 9:26

26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

Notice how Paul introduces a second sport into this illustration—boxing. He says, “I do not fight as one who beats the air.” The expression “beating the air” is what inexperienced boxers do—they swing and miss (wast their punches)!

If we’re going to win this fight, we must avoid doing what inexperienced boxers do. We must avoid wasting our punches. We waste our punches whenever we fight anyone not named “the flesh” (i.e. family, friends, co-workers, employers, politicians, church-people, even the devil). Again, the real enemy is IN-A-ME!

Thus, we’re back where we’ve started. However, we learned a few things along the way. For instance, we learned that simply being a devout church-goer or ‘truth seeker’ is not enough. If we truly want to obtain the ‘prize’, then we must recognize that the prize is CHRIST (His life, His righteousness), and not just His teachings. In addition, we also learned that we cannot win Christ (experience His life) without first experiencing (sharing in) His sufferings and death. (This is because His life is described as a resurrection.)