



10: Running for the PRIZE (1 Corinthians 9)

Many people have disciplined body & mind to attain earthly goals, but at the end of life, very few of those accomplishments will matter. But...what if we put that kind of effort in knowing Jesus and making Him known to others? Followers of Jesus are to run, ever aware of the PRIZE at the end of the race.

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VISUAL NOTES

Catch the Context

1 Corinthians 8:12-13 (CSB)

Now when you sin like this against brothers and sisters and wound their weak conscience, you are sinning against Christ. Therefore, **if food causes my brother or sister to fall, I will never again eat meat**, so that I won't cause my brother or sister to fall.

Paul was free to eat any food, even food sacrificed to idols, which represent *false* gods. Some believers who knew this were being stumbling blocks to younger believers who couldn't yet understand this truth. These believers cared more about their **freedom** than their younger brothers'/sisters' **faith**. Paul cared more about the young Christians faith, and was careful not to do anything that caused other Christians **to fall**.

Paul's Credentials as an Apostle

1 Corinthians 9:1-2 (CSB)

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you, because you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

If anybody is **free** it would be **an apostle** of Jesus, those who had **seen Jesus** and been sent out by Him to carry the gospel to others. (Paul testifies about Jesus' call on his life in Acts 9:1-22; Ac 22:6-11; 26:12-18; 1 Cor 15:8). Despite being an apostle, Paul limits his own freedom to encourage these people he loves so much, those who are **the seal** of his **apostleship**. Just as a **seal** from a signet ring gave proof as to who the letter was from, Paul's impact on the lives of Corinthians prove he was **an apostle** of the Lord Jesus, called to carry the gospel message to them.

Paul's Rights as an Apostle

1 Corinthians 9:3-5 (CSB)

My defense to those who examine me is this: Don't we have the right to eat and drink? Don't we have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife like the other apostles, the Lord's brothers, and Cephas?

Couldn't Paul exercise his freedom to eat or drink whatever he wanted? Yep...but he didn't. Paul also notes that and **the Lord's brothers** (Jacob/James & Judah) **and Cephas** (Peter) were married and able to bring their wives on their mission.

- Catholics maintain that Peter was the first pope, but this is not true, as Roman Catholicism didn't become authoritative until the 6th century (with Pope Gregory I - 590 CE). If Peter was the first pope then he was married, and this should do away with necessity of priestly celibacy.

Couldn't Paul exercise the same freedom - to marry and bring his wife with him? Sure. But he didn't.

YOUR NOTES HERE

Paul's Provision as an Apostle

1 Corinthians 9:6-10 (CSB) Or do only Barnabas and I have no right to refrain from working? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its fruit? Or who shepherds a flock and does not drink the milk from the flock? Am I saying this from a human perspective? Doesn't the law also say the same thing? For it is written in the law of Moses, *Do not muzzle an ox while it treads out grain*. Is God really concerned about oxen? Isn't He really saying it for our sake? Yes, this is written for our sake, because he who plows ought to plow in hope, and **he who threshes should thresh in hope of sharing the crop**.

Soldiers, farmers, and **shepherds** don't work for free; they are all provided for by those they serve. So too the apostles could **refrain from working** another job. But Paul and Barnabas chose not to use this freedom either.

The quote about not muzzling an ox comes from Deut 25:4. God's people were commanded to feed the ox while it was working for them. Paul reasons that if God commands animals be "paid" for their work, then God is much more concerned that people are paid for their work - that **he who threshes should thresh in hope of sharing the crop**.

1 Corinthians 9:11-14 (CSB)

If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it too much if we reap material benefits from you? If others have this right to receive benefits from you, don't we even more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right; instead, we endure everything so that we will not hinder the gospel of Christ. Don't you know that those who perform the temple services eat the food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the offerings of the altar? In the same way, **the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should earn their living by the gospel**.

In the Old Covenant system the Jewish priests who served at the temple would be given some of the meat from **the offerings of the altar** (Lv 6:16,26; 7:6,31-32; Nm 5:9-10; 18:8-20,31; Dt 18:1). This illustration made sense to pagans as priests at the temple of Apollo and Aphrodite would have eaten from the offerings as well.

Paul notes that in the New Covenant system, "**the Lord**" (JESUS) **has commanded that those who preach the gospel should earn their living by the gospel**.

1 Corinthians 9:15-16 (CSB)

For my part I have used none of these rights, nor have I written these things that they may be applied in my case. For it would be better for me to die than for anyone to deprive me of my boast! For if I preach the gospel, I have no reason to boast, because I am compelled to preach—and woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

1 Corinthians 9:17-18 (CSB) For if I do this willingly, I have a reward, but if unwillingly, I am entrusted with a commission. What then is my reward? To **preach the gospel and offer it free of charge** and not make full use of my rights in the gospel.

Why didn't Paul capitalize on his right to receive compensation?

1. Paul was a Pharisee who had been trained to teach the Scriptures, but also to work a trade. Pharisees were the blue-collar religious leaders of their day, men who rubbed shoulders with the working class because they were the working class. (Sadducees were the elite class.)
 2. Paul didn't want to be indebted to anyone. Traveling teachers & philosophers like Paul supported themselves in one of four ways: charging fees, staying in well-to-do households, begging, or working at a trade.¹
 - Staying at a wealthy Corinthian's house or receiving money from Corinthians meant his financiers might expect Paul to support his political agenda. Paul wouldn't allow his ministry to be impacted in this way. This is why he lived with the Christian couple he worked with - Aquila & Priscilla (Acts 18:1-3).
- ★Note: Paul sometimes had churches from another city provide for his mission needs, but did not receive funds from those in the city he was staying in.

YOUR NOTES HERE

¹ Craig Blomberg, 1 Corinthians, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 173.

Paul's Desire to Share Jesus with Jews

1 Corinthians 9:19-20 (CSB)

Although **I am free from all** and not anyone's slave, I have made myself a slave to everyone, in order to win more people. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews; to those under the law, like one under the law—though I myself am not under the law—to win those under the law.

While Paul was **free from all**, not indebted to any man, he *chose* to become **a slave to everyone**. A Hebrew who sold himself into slavery to repay a debt had to be set free on the 7th year of his work, but...he could *choose* to remain as a permanent slave, by having his ear pierced as a sign of his desire to stay (Ex 21:2-6). Paul had chosen to be a slave to everyone to **win more people** for Jesus, regardless of their religious or ethnic background.

When Paul was around **Jews** he **became like a Jew**. Although Paul was a Jew, it is obvious that He did not always live like a Jew - Paul evidently didn't feel bound by the dietary law, the Sabbath, the festivals, nor the rabbinical traditions (see Col 2:16). Yet, when Paul was around other Jews he did all he could do not to offend them (e.g. following dietary restrictions), but to gain an audience with them. For example, Paul takes the Nazarite vow (purifying himself in a ceremonial washing and shaving head) to demonstrate to the Jews that he is a Jew who follows the Old Testament law (Acts 21:17-24).

Ultimately, many Jews *were offended* by the message of Jesus, but it wasn't because Paul was flaunting his freedom in front of them. He made himself a slave, limiting his freedom, in order **to win those under the law** - Jews.

Paul's Desire to Share Jesus with Gentiles & Weak

1 Corinthians 9:21-23 (CSB)

To those who are without the law, like one without the law—though I am not without God's law but under the law of Christ—to win those without the law. To the weak I became weak, in order to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some. Now I do all this because of the gospel, so that I may share in the blessings.

Paul uses a different tactic to reach non-Jews - **those without the law**. Paul likely ate what they ate, dressed like they dressed, and went where they went and adapted to the culture - all without disobeying God.

Paul mentions another group that he found common ground with - **the weak** - likely either people weak in their faith or maybe generally recognized as physically or intellectually weaker people of their society. Paul would take the time to explain the gospel for those who didn't understand quickly. Further, Paul would have been careful not to eat or drink anything that caused confusion for the more immature Christians in Corinth.

That sounds like a lot of effort doesn't it? Learning the cultures and adjusting to the cultural norms? *WHY?* To see as many saved from their sins as possible!

🤔 **Are we like that?** Do we so want to see people follow Jesus so that we are willing to put our preferences on the back burner, and find some common ground with others - to care for people different than us but have the same NEEDS as us - forgiveness & a relationship with the God who created them - **by every possible means to save some?** Paul discovered that getting the GOSPEL out to others is more important than our comfort.

WHAT are **the blessings of the gospel?**

- To see people follow Jesus here on Earth and live with them forever!
- To hear "well done" by our Creator & Redeemer.

Run to Win!

1 Corinthians 9:24-25 (CSB)

Don't you know that the runners in a stadium all race, but only one receives the prize? **Run in such a way to win the prize.** Now everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything. They do it to receive a perishable crown, but **we an imperishable crown.**

The Isthmian Games were held every 2 years and the competitors trained for 10 months, while the last month was spent in Corinth being supervised in daily workouts in the gym and on the athletic fields.² These people didn't restrict their diet, train to exhaustion, and invest all this time to LOSE. They were preparing to **win the prize**.

- That **prize was a perishable crown** - Some say it was a wreath braided from withered celery (Plutarch), which would obviously rot.³ Others say it was interwoven pine straw. This **perishable crown** would not last for long.
- We seek **an imperishable crown** - one that won't rot, but will last - eternal life! This is the crown of victory.

² John F. MacArthur Jr., 1 Corinthians, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 214-215.

³ David A. deSilva, "The Social and Geographical World of Roman Corinth (Acts 18:1-18; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1)," in Lexham Geographic Commentary on Acts through Revelation, ed. Barry J. Beitzel, Jessica Parks, and Doug Mangum, Lexham Geographic Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 468-469.

Becoming a Disciplined Disciple

1 Corinthians 9:26-27 (CSB)

So I do not run like one who runs aimlessly or box like one beating the air. Instead, **I discipline my body** and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

Paul isn't just going through the motions. He is training hard to compete for the prize with the end of the race in mind. While on earth, Paul is becoming a disciplined disciple, whose *WALK* matches up with his *TALK*. He wants to make sure that his life of preaching to others is backed up by his faithfulness in following Jesus.

❓ What are YOU doing to become a disciplined disciple of Jesus (rather than disqualified)?

- Making time for Scripture & prayer?
- Walking in obedience?
- Spending time with maturing Christians?
- What are you doing to take the good news to others?

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Have questions and need some help? ...real soon...how about now? Please **call** or **text** us soon!

- * Contact **Jackie** (850-673-1582), **Christy** (850-673-9764), or another follower of Jesus soon!
- * Or call our **deacons & wives**: Alan & Christy Androski (850-464-1428), Freddy & Joyce Howard (850-973-0047), Tim & Joni Hughey (850-464-1156), Mark & Dot Mancil (850-253-5405), Boss & Amelia Mulkey (850-464-6717), Jim & Derita Pinkard (850-464-6188), or Tom & Martha Waddail (850-973-0011).

discussionquestions

Take some time to discuss these questions with your family, friends, or group.

1. What challenged or encouraged you most from today's teaching? Explain your answer.
2. **Read 1 Cor 9:12-14.** What are the rights of those who preach the gospel and why was Paul willing to lay aside those rights?
3. What are some of your rights and freedoms as a Christian? Under what circumstances should we take advantage of our rights, and when should we willingly waive them?
4. **Read 1 Cor 9:19-23.** Why did Paul make himself a slave to everyone? (9:19) and to what extent did Paul go to see people follow Jesus? (9:20-23)
5. How can we show our love to unbelievers while refusing to participate in activity that is sinful?
6. What right have you given up because it may have caused others to stumble?
7. What actions could disqualify a person from being rewarded by God for serving Him? What should you do to be assured of finishing your life well?
8. How can neglecting spiritual disciplines (such as prayer, Bible study, and worship) disqualify a Christian from having an influence on unbelievers?
9. What other questions has this teaching or discussion prompted for us to talk about?
10. **Share prayer needs and pray for one another.** Continue to pray for our Supreme Court decision on Roe v Wade. Pray for Christians in Ukraine and Russia to carry the message of Jesus with them wherever they go. Also, PRAY that God will greatly use us to impact people who need to follow Jesus.