

Sermon 45: Triumphing in the Christian Life: 1 Corinthians 9:19-27

Text: 1 Corinthians 9:19-27 "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you. Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: 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..."

Introduction:

- **Paul loved athletic analogies**
 - **Running:**
 - **1 Corinthians 9:24** "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain..."
 - **Philippians 3:13-14** "I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus..."
 - **Galatians 2:2** "I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain..."
 - **Galatians 5:7** "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?"
 - **Hebrews 12:1-2** Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith..."

- **Wrestling: Ephesians 6:12** "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..."
- **Boxing: 2 Timothy 4:7-8** "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day..."
- **General Athletic competition: 2 Timothy 2:5** "If a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully..."
- **Some important words:**
 - **Struggle:**
 - **Press:** Running swiftly to catch someone in a race.
 - **Strive:** ἀθλέω Contending in athletic competition.
 - **Patience:** Steadfast endurance
 - **Fought:** ἀγωνίζομαι Contending in athletic games.
 - **End:**
 - **Course:** The location of an athletic competition
 - **Rules:** Expectations for competition.
 - **Prize:** A reward given to a victor of an athletic competition.

Summary: Every Christian must develop the mindset and discipline of a well-trained athlete.

Part 1: Self-restraint: 9:19-22 "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some..."

- **He had personal freedom: 9:19** "though I be free from all men..."
- **He willingly limited that freedom:**
 - **Jews:** Jewish culture and religion
 - **Under the law:** People whose conscience was bound
 - **To them without the law:** Gentiles
 - **To the weak:** Two possibilities
 - Weak conscience
 - Weak position within society

- **All men:** "I am made all things to all men..."
- **This adjustment is not pragmatic:**
 - **This was not about self-advancement: 9:19** "yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more..."
 - **He was limiting freedom, not throwing of his moral obligations to God: 9:21** "Being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ"
- **It was principled and motivated by love: 9:22** "That I might by all means save some..."
 - He laid aside unnecessary offenses.
 - He had to articulate some necessary offenses.
 - He always called people to hope in Christ.

Part 2: Gospel motives: 9:23 "And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you..."

- **He wanted the gospel to spread:**
- **He wanted to experience a deep partnership with the church: συγκαινωνός**
 - **Grafted in: Romans 11:17** "If some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree..."
 - **Experiencing God's grace together: Philippians 1:7** "I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace..."
 - **Experiencing the same affliction: Revelation 1:9** "I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ..."

Part 3: Running to win: 9:24 "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain..."

- **Everyone runs:** "They which run in a race run all..."
- **Not everyone finishes successfully:** "But one receiveth the prize..."
- **We run must purposefully:** "So run, that ye may obtain..."

Part 4: The incorruptible prize: 9:25 "And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible..."

- **The illustration of an elite athlete:** "Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things..."
- **Their motive is temporary:** "They do it to obtain a corruptible crown..."
- **Our motive is eternal:** "But we an incorruptible..."

Part 5: Disqualification: 9:26-27 "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: 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's teaching shaped his own personal conduct: 9:26** "I therefore so run..."
- **He had a goal: 9:26** "Not as uncertainly...not as one that beateth the air..."
- **He disciplined his body: 9:27** "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection..."
- **He did not want to be a hypocrite: 9:27** "Lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway..."
- **He did not want to be disqualified from being found faithful: 9:27** "I myself should be a castaway..."
 - **Does not pass the test.**
 - **Not approved.**
 - **The opposite of 2 Timothy 2:15** "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth..."

Applying the text:

- **Perspective:**
 - The Christian life is a race demanding endurance.
 - God sets the rules and gives us a specific race to run.
 - We are personally responsible for what we do in that race.
 - It is an intense struggle demanding personal restraint and self-sacrifice.
 - We must have a clear objective to endure and strive as Paul commands.
 - We must lay aside our perceived rights and preferences for the sake of the ministry.
- **Resolve:**
 - Resolve to submit to God's absolute standard.
 - Resolve to set your mind to endure.
 - Resolve to be willing to lay aside your perceived rights and preferences.
 - Resolve to stay committed to the end of your race.
 - Resolve to not waste your life in temporal, secondary pursuits.
 - Resolve to get back up when you have stumbled.