

FROM STRUGGLE TO VICTORY

Win the Prize!

1 Corinthians 9:24 - 10:13

INTRODUCTION: I will run with Jesus! Will you?

Paul ran the race with Jesus. Listen to what he said.

1 Corinthians 9:24–25 24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain *it*. 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*.

Brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ, all of us who have been saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus, are in the race, running with Jesus.

Amen? Is that not right? Are you saved? Then you're in the race!

That is why Paul says "all run."

And Paul says that we believers run the race in this life to receive an imperishable crown in the next.

We should take note: There are five crowns to be given at the Judgment Seat of Christ – the Crown of Life, the Crown of Glory, the Crown of Rejoicing, the Crown of Righteousness, and the Imperishable Crown. Each of these is available only to those who have already been saved by grace through faith. These crowns are rewards for those who run the race of life well, those who run with faithfulness.

Paul proceeds to tell the Corinthians what he does to try to win the prize of the Imperishable Crown.

I. **WINNING THE PRIZE REQUIRES INTENTIONALITY. (9:26)**

1 Cor. 9:26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as *one who beats the air*.

There is no uncertainty, nothing haphazard, about the way Paul lived his Christian life or ran the race. It was purposeful, deliberate.

He was not shadow boxing or just playing around. Paul ran; Paul lived for Christ with intentionality.

- Do you have a plan for developing a retirement fund?
- Do you have a plan for stretching your retirement funds so that they last as long as you do?
- Do you have a plan for career development?
- Do you make plans for your vacation?
- Do you have plans for the next project you want to do around the house?
- Is anybody making plans to do anything????
- What are your plans for running the race with Christ so that you can win the Imperishable Crown? I hope you have a plan for reading God's Word, either through the NT with the rest of us or another, perhaps more extensive or challenging plan.
- What is the plan for developing and using your spiritual gifts?
- What is your plan to grow in areas where you know you are weak?

WINNING THE PRIZE REQUIRES INTENTIONALITY.

II. WINNING THE PRIZE REQUIRES DICIPLINE. (9:27)

1 Cor. 9:27 But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Here Paul says that winning the race, serving God in such a way that it counts for eternity, requires discipline.

Paul testifies that he disciplines his body, literally - gives his body a black eye, and brings it into subjection (literally - makes it his slave). I know what Paul is talking about. I don't know in what ways Paul had to beat his body into submission but I know I have to beat my body into submission trying to lose the weight I need to lose, I've lost 15 pounds, and it feels like I can only get it off 1/10th of an ounce at a time! If I walk into a kitchen where something good is cooking, I am afraid to inhale lest I gain 5 pounds by breathing in the flavor.

Paul said he had to beat his body into submission, lest even while in the midst of performing his ministry, he should be disqualified, a word that means "not fit for its intended purpose."

The issue here is not possible removal from the team. He is not discussing loss of salvation but loss of opportunity of obtaining the Imperishable Crown.

Paul says, "I strongly discipline my life so that I will not be disqualified from effectively serving God." Then he urges the believers he is writing ...

III. DON'T BE DISQUALIFIED FROM WINNING. (10:1-5)

1 Cor. 10:1-5 1 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. 5 But with most of them God was not well pleased, for *their bodies* were scattered in the wilderness.

In essence, Paul says: all of the Israelites were made part of a kingdom of priests to represent God to the surrounding nations. But most of them were disqualified from serving effectively as God's ambassadors. The things that disqualified them from effective service will also disqualify us who are called to serve Christ. How can we be disqualified? Paul lists four ways and provides a biblical example of each.

A. By idolatry - giving the honor, homage, or worship that belongs only to God to something or someone else. (10:7)

1 Cor. 10:7 And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play."

O.T. Example: Ex. 32:6 - Israel worshiped the golden calf.

They called the golden calf "YHWH," but they were not worshipping "YHWH" because YHWH said He could not be worshipped with idols.

They substituted their way for God's way of worship.

Consequently they honored their own choice above God's choice.

This was idolatry.

There is a lot of "worship" and "service" and "work" in the name of Christianity that is far from the way Christ said it should be done.

- When a pastor or the pope give approval to civil unions or gay marriage rather than calling people to repentance and redemption, then he is guilty of idolatry. He has honored his own human reason and intellect above the wisdom of God, whose Word he refutes in vain arguments.
- When a Christian says I am going to do what I want or what I think is best, and I don't care what the Bible says, he or she is committing idolatry. He has given homage to the changing philosophies of men over the changeless Word of our Creator.

B. By immorality (10:8)

1 Cor. 10:8 Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell;

O.T. Example: Num. 25:1-9 - Israel passed thru Moab; King Balak enlists the seer Balaam to curse Israel. Every intended curse turned into a prophecy of blessing. So Balaam advised the king to tell the women of Moab to go down and invite the Israelite men to participate in some of the local customs, gain a little mutual understanding. The men went with the women to sacrificial feasts dedicated to Baal which turned into licentious orgies.

What the devil could not accomplish directly through false prophecy, he accomplished by enticement into immorality.

If the devil cannot make your testimony ineffective by a direct frontal assault, he will do his best to disqualify you by leading you into immorality.

Most often this begins with God's people as it did to Israel here through casual social contact. He would love to develop a friendship between you and a member of the opposite sex that he can stir into a poisonous relationship that will kill your ministry.

- Husbands, do not go alone to lunch or somewhere else with a female business associate.
- Wives, do not develop friendships with other men that do not include your husband.

C. By testing Christ (10:9)

1 Cor. 10:9 nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents;

O.T. Example: Num. 21:6-9 - People were discouraged. Some spoke against God saying, "God has not given us food or water. This manna is worthless!"

This is pushing God to the limits to see how much you can get from God or how much you can get by with God.

How close can I come to the sin of the world without incurring the chastisement of God? Walking the edge, getting as close as you can without falling all the way in.

Trouble is nobody continually walks the edge without taking a fall.

D. By complaining (10:10)

1 Cor. 10:10 nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

O.T. Example: Num. 16:31-35 – After Korah rebelled against God, the Lord caused the earth to swallow up rebellious Korah and gang, so some of the people complained about the justice of God.

We live in a world in which the loudest complaints against the justice of God come from Christian leaders.

Some are so intent upon explaining away every passage of Scripture that chronicles the righteous wrath of God against the unbelieving and unrepentant man that they have convinced a good portion of the world that there is no judgment and there is no hell.

This is dissatisfaction with God's character and His sovereignty.

Paul concludes these warnings with

1 Cor. 10:11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

Folks, THESE WARNINGS ARE FOR US!

IV. THE PRIZE IS FOR THE HUMBLE. (10:12)

1 Cor. 10:12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

Whenever we are at the point to say, "I would never do that," we are the most vulnerable.

V. GOD HAS MADE A WAY TO WIN! (10:13)

1 Cor. 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*.

God wants us to win. Unlike the races with which most of us are familiar, there does not have to be just one winner. There can be any number of winners of the Imperishable Crown. And God wants each of us to receive it.

But everybody won't receive it. Not even all those who are saved will receive it. While God wants each of us to win the crown, He does not lower the standard so that all will meet it.

But what God does is to make a way, a training plan if you will, that will bring any saved person to the point that they can win the race, they can receive the Imperishable Crown. He does this in two ways:

- A. God will not let Satan and his demonic assistants tempt you beyond what you have the strength to resist.** God will not allow it, and they do not have the power to overcome God's protective limit.
- B. With every temptation, God makes a way to escape available.** We may say, "I could not help myself. I could not resist." But that is never true. God always provides a way for us to escape the temptation. We must make the choice to use it.

CONCLUSION: Brothers and sisters in Christ, the gun has sounded, the race is on and we are in the middle of it. Our lane in which we are assigned to run is clearly marked. If we stumble and step upon the chalk or venture outside our lane briefly, we are not hastily removed from the run. We can stop and return to the place of infraction and reenter the lane having endured the delay but still pressing on for the finish line. For God has promised that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

But do not think that any of us can arrogantly leave the lane, abandoning the rules for others to follow. Do not think that we can run the whole race outside the lines, complete the race and claim the prize. What an excruciating disappointment it would be to cross the line and learn we were disqualified.

What is your plan?