

16<sup>th</sup> October 2019.

## RUNNING THE RACE TO WIN.

### I Corinthians 9.

In our continuance of our study of Paul's letter to the Corinthians, in a section we have been seeing him address issues the Corinthian brethren had queried him about, having noted from our study last week that there were four basic principles that he'd given the believers that would guide them in making personal decisions about those "questionable" areas of the Christian life.

The first of which we saw last week as "**knowledge must be balanced by love,**" when among other things we learnt that knowledge must be mixed with love; otherwise, the saints will end up with "big heads" instead of enlarged hearts, and thus swell, instead of growing. In that, knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

Our passage tonight is themed about the second principle that "**authority must be balanced by discipline**".

From my earliest days of my faith walk some 31 years ago, I found the concluding verses of this chapter so inspirational to me and feel honored and challenged to even just have the opportunity to title my message with them in mind. Yet looking at their context sheds more light and gives a better perspective that gives true understanding of God's Word.

Reading the passage.....

This chapter deals with Paul's policy of financial support, and it appears to be an interruption to his discussion of "meats offered to idols." Actually, it is not an interruption; it is an illustration of the very principles that he presents in chapter 8 and chapter 10. Paul used himself as an illustration of the mature use of liberty: he was free to receive financial support from the Corinthian church, yet he set aside that right in order to achieve a higher goal.

In these verses the apostle hints at the great encouragement he had to act in this manner. He had a glorious prize, an incorruptible crown, in view. Upon this head he compares himself to the racers and combatants in the Olympic and Isthmian games, an allusion well known to the Corinthians, because they were celebrated in their neighbourhood: vs 24..... And here,

I. He excites them to their duty: “So run that you may obtain. It is quite otherwise in the Christian race than in your races; only one wins the prize in them. You may all run so as to obtain. You have great encouragement, therefore, to persist constantly, and diligently, and vigorously, in your course. There is room for all to get the prize. You cannot fail if you run well. Yet there should be a noble emulation; you should endeavour to outdo one another. And scripturally it would be in love and sincere obedience to Jesus Christ’s teachings and instructions. Imagine how awesome it would be if we out did each other in considering one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as we see the Day approaching. (Heb. 10:24,25)

II. He directs them in their course, by setting more fully to view his own example, still carrying on the allusion. 1. Those that ran in their games were kept to a set diet.... Being temperate in all things..... He says in vs 23... “Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you....

Even as a bonafide Apostle, he has not used his rights, enduring all things lest he hinders the gospel of Christ (vs 12). Never giving allowance to the abuse of his authority in the gospel (vs 18). But becoming all things to all men, that he may by all means save some.(vs 22).

The athletes in your races, he says, are kept to strict diet and discipline; infact, they keep themselves to it. They do not indulge themselves, but restrain themselves from the food they eat and so from the liberties they use on other occasions. And should not Christians much more abridge themselves of their liberty, for so glorious an end as winning the race, and obtaining the prize set before them? They used a very spare diet, and course food, and denied themselves much, to prepare for their race and combat; so do I; so should you, after my example. It is hard if, for the heavenly crown, you cannot abstain from heathen sacrifices.”

Secondly, they were not only temperate, but put themselves to hardships. Those who fought with one another in these exercises prepared themselves by beating the air, others often run long and stretched hard in preparation for the games. Yet Paul tells us in I Tim 4:8-10 “ For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.

For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.”

They must fight, not as those that beat the air, but must strive against their enemies with all their might. One enemy the apostle here mentions, namely, the body; this must be kept under, beaten black and blue, as the combatants were in these Grecian games, and thereby brought into subjection. By the body we are to understand fleshly appetites and inclinations. These the apostle set himself to curb and conquer, and in this the Corinthians and us should imitate him. Note, Those who would rightly pursue the interests of their souls must beat down their bodies, and keep them under.

And this is in respect to all fields of life. The body is like enemy number 1.

They must combat hard with fleshly lusts, and not indulge a wanton appetite, and long for heathenish sacrifices, nor eat them, to please their flesh, at the hazard of their brethren's souls.

III. The apostle presses this advice on the Corinthians by proper arguments drawn from the same contenders. 1. They take pains, and undergo all those hardships, to obtain a corruptible crown (vs 25), but we an incorruptible one. Those who conquered in these games were crowned only with the withering leaves or boughs of trees, of olive, bays, or laurel. But Christians have an incorruptible crown in view, a crown of glory that never fades away, an inheritance incorruptible, reserved in heaven for them. (I Pet.5:4).

2. The racers in these games run at uncertainty. All run, but one receives the prize, (vs 24). Every racer, therefore, is at a great uncertainty whether he shall win it or no. But the Christian racer is at no such uncertainty. Every one may run here so as to obtain; but then he must run within the lines, he must keep to the path of duty prescribed, which, some think, is the meaning of running not as uncertainly, (vs26). He who keeps within the limits prescribed, and keeps on in his race, will never miss his crown, though others may get theirs before him. And would the Grecian racers keep within their bounds, and exert themselves to the very last, when one only could win, and all must be uncertain which that one would be? And shall not Christians be much more exact and vigorous when all are sure of a crown when they come to the end of their race?

3. He sets before himself and them the danger of yielding to fleshly inclinations, and pampering the body and its lusts and appetites: (vs 27.....),

I myself should be a cast-away rejected, disapproved, - one to whom the judge or umpire of the race, will not decree the crown. The allusion to the games runs through the whole sentence. Note, A preacher of salvation may yet miss it. He may show others the way to heaven, and never get there himself. [The story of Charles Templeton]. To prevent this, Paul took so much pains in subduing and keeping under bodily inclinations, lest by any means he himself, who had preached to others, should yet miss the crown, be disapproved and rejected by his sovereign Judge. A holy fear of himself was necessary to preserve the fidelity of an apostle; and how much more necessary is it to our preservation? Note, Holy fear of ourselves, and not presumptuous confidence, is the best security against apostasy from God, and final rejection by him. [ Which we see him follow on about in chapter 10].

And it's best for us to heed the advice of him that said "imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (11:1)

Because we have him in II Timothy 4:5-8 say "But you, be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."