



SUNDAY SCHOOL

Participant 10/21/2018

H

HIGHLIGHT: 1 Corinthians 9:19-27

¹⁹Although I am a free man and not anyone's slave, I have made myself a slave to everyone, in order to win more people. ²⁰To 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. ²¹To those who are without that law, like one without the law—not being without God's law but within Christ's law—to win those without the law. ²²To 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. ²³Now I do all this because of the gospel, so I may become a partner in its benefits.

²⁴Don'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. ²⁵Now everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything. However, they do it to receive a crown that will fade away, but we a crown that will never fade away. ²⁶Therefore I do not run like one who runs aimlessly or box like one beating the air. ²⁷Instead, I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

E

EXPLAIN

Greeks had two world-famous athletic festivals: the Olympic Games and the Isthmian Games. The second of these two festivals, the Isthmian Games, were held in Corinth—the city to which Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. The athletes in these games would stick to extremely strict training regimens so that they would be in the best possible shape to win the prize at the end of them. Everybody in Corinth would have been familiar with these games and the lengths to which the athletes devoted themselves to them, so Paul uses them to draw out a bigger picture for the believers there: Athletes train day and night to win a prize made of leaves; what are *you* doing to receive a prize that lasts forever?



- v.19-23** In this complicatedly worded section, Paul lays out his missionary principle: be “all things to all people.” Not to be confused with being a people-pleaser for the sake of getting them to like him, being “all things” was how Paul attempted to cater to the personal, cultural, or religious patterns of the people to whom he was speaking—all for the purpose of attempting to win them for the Gospel.
- v.20** The “Jews” and “those under the law” are essentially the same. There are two places in Scripture where we get a glimpse of what Paul is talking about here: when he circumcised Timothy in Acts 16:3 and when he underwent a seven-day Nazarite vow in Acts 21:20-26. Paul circumcised Timothy not because circumcision is necessary for salvation, but because if an uncircumcised Jew walked into a synagogue, an instant barrier would be set up between Paul/Timothy and those they were trying to win for the Gospel. Likewise, Paul’s Nazarite vow in Acts 21 was not because taking the vow brought him closer to God, it was a “political” move to help him bridge the gap between Jewish and Gentile Christians in Jerusalem.
- v.21** “Christ’s law” probably refers to two things: the principle of self-sacrifice (Mk 10:45. It is also consistent with the theme of self-discipline in this passage) and of love being the summary of God’s Law (Mt. 22:37-40; Romans 13:8-10; Gal. 5:13-14). Paul was not advocating submitting to Christ’s law because it is a duty; rather, submission to His law proves your devotion to Him.
- v.22** Being “all things to all people” is not a charge to be wishy-washy or a people-pleaser. Instead, it demonstrates Paul’s desire to reach as many as he can for Christ by adjusting how he delivers the message of the Gospel.
- v.24** Using athletic imagery was common in Greco-Roman literary circles of the time because it was one nearly everybody understood. However, while the Isthmian Games (which were held biennially in Corinth) crowned only one victor, Christianity does not. It is not a competition. Thus, Paul used this metaphor not to talk about the competition of the games, but to illustrate what it takes to compete well.
- vv.26-27** Paul’s main point in 1 Corinthians 8-10 is the necessity of self-control and self-discipline, *especially* in the context of the freedom granted by Jesus Christ. His comments on discipline are not to be tied to a discussion about the doctrine of eternal security or the means of salvation—salvation is God’s to give, and you receive it by grace alone through faith alone. Still, there exists a tension between divine sovereignty (John 10:28-30) and man’s responsibility (James 2:14-26). Those whose prize is Jesus Christ will act in the way that their Lord has commanded that they act—not because it will save them, but because they have been saved.



A**APPLY**

1. What stuck out to you or challenged you in what you heard in the sermon or read in the text?
2. Based on this passage, what do you think a believer's main focus should be? What are some things that distract us?
3. Why does Paul compare living a Christian life with that of an athlete? What is the purpose of an athlete's self-denial? How should self-denial (or self-control) look in a Christian's life?
4. How is discipline different from legalism? How, specifically, can we discipline ourselves to be better co-laborers for the Gospel?
5. The Corinthians craved honor and fame from the athletic competitions, and proved it by training themselves day and night to receive that prize. **What prize do you think the people around you are running for? What prize are you running for?**

R**RESPOND**

- What are you running for—something temporary or something eternal?
- What is something you need to trim out of your life this week so that you can be a better servant of others, that you “might win more of them” to Christ?



