Believers Running to Receive the Prize

1Co 9:22 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.

23 And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.

24 Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

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.

26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

27 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.

The Great challenges of the Scripture

Giving up my own will, my way, my own ease, my own pleasure, and my own profit, that I might see all souls saved.

Paul is still giving an inside look into his heart and ministry

He viewed the Christian life and ministry.

Unique in its description

Paul's describes his feelings about the Christian life in terms of an athlete

1. The runner
2. The boxer

No True Christian believer can approach the Christian life with a flabby attitude. No genuine Christian can indulge the body and its lusts and expect to win the incorruptible crown of the Christian life.

Corinth was known for the Isthmian Games which were second only to the Olympic Games of the Grecian and Roman world.

Therefore, everyone in the Corinthian church knew the point Paul was making.

*Shockingly*, he says that a true minister and a true believer of the Lord is to live a life just as disciplined as an olympic athlete.

He actually says that we are to keep *our bodies* under control just as much as the athlete.

1Co 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.

1. He enters the race to run and win (v.24).

Php 3:14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

2.  He strenuously disciplines and controls himself (v.25).

1Co 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.

3.  He runs to obtain an incorruptible crown (v.25).

4.  He runs and fights with certainty and without distraction (v.26).

1Co 9:26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

5.  He masters his own body (v.27).

1Co 9:27 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.

6.  He guards against disqualification (v.27).

**I.** The believer enters the Christian race to win. In the athletic contest every runner enters the race for one purpose only: to win. However, only one receives the prize; there is only one winner. The believer enters the Christian race for one purpose only: to win. Therefore, he strains in running to obtain the prize. Nothing is acceptable except running, running hard and running to win:

Walking fast is unacceptable.

Jogging is unacceptable.

Lagging behind is unacceptable.

Showing little concern for the finish line is unacceptable.

Every believer must run *as diligently* as the runner at the Olympic Games. The believer must put out the *same kind of vigorous effort* in order to reach the finish line. He must be vigorous and diligent; he must persist in the Christian race.

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain 1 Cor. 9:24

Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?

Galatians 5:7

Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain (Phil. 2:16).

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus

Phil 3:14

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 (Hebrews 12:1).

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: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

**II.** The (believer) strenuously disciplines and controls himself. Every runner and boxer is highly disciplined in body, mind, thought, spirit, exercise, workouts, and contests.

He is disciplined...

in body: what he eats and how much he eats.

in mind and thought: his concentration on the goal and how to best gear his body, spirit, and mind to that end.

in spirit: in keeping his spirit strong and motivated for the strain necessary to work out day by day and to reach his goal.

The believer is to do no less. He must be just as disciplined as the athlete. The word "striveth" means agony. He disciplines himself to the point of pain.

The discipline covers "all things." It covers his body, mind, and spirit, the place where God's presence actually dwells. Therefore, he does not allow anything to *touch or enter* his body that is corrupt, impure, polluted, or that will cause a more rapid deterioration of the temple.

1.  The believer controls his body. His body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:1-2).

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite" (Proverbs 23:2).

Hast thou found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it" (Proverbs 25:16).

2.  The believer controls his mind and thoughts.

 For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be (Romans 8:5-7).

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart (Matthew 5:28).

3.  The believer must control his spirit.

Pr 16:32 ¶ He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.

Pr 25:28 ¶ He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.

Ac 17:16 ¶ Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

4.  The believer works out consistently in ministry and service to others.

Philippians 2:12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10).

Eph 6:7 With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men:

Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear Heb 12:28

Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling Psalm 2:11

**1 Corinthians 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.

**III.** The believer runs to obtain an *incorruptible crown*.

Runners in a race run to obtain a corruptible crown. The athletes in Paul's day ran for a crown or wreath of olive or pine leaves.

The crown of the genuine Christian runner will never pass away. His crown is incorruptible.

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:8).

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him (James 1:12).

And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away

1 Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

1 Peter 5:4

And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

Behold, I come quickly; hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Rev. 3:11).

The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne" (Rev. 4:10).

1Co 9:26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

**IV**. The believer runs and fights with certainty and without distraction.

Effort is necessary, effort that sacrifices and strains to the point of hurting.

Just like the runner. He runs with certainty and without distraction. He knows where the track is; he knows where the lines on the track are, and where the finish line is. He is not uncertain:

sometimes keenly aware of the race, other times not so sure.

sometimes active, other times inactive.

sometimes practicing, other times laying out.

sometimes controlling, other times indulging.

sometimes staying in the lines, other times moving out.

sometimes keeping his eyes on the finish line, other times glancing away.

He is like a boxer. He knows where the ring is, and he knows his opponent. Therefore, he does not beat the air as a boxer who misses his target. He is not just swinging wildly, hoping to hit the mark. He does not walk out of the ring in the middle of the fight; he stays in and fights. He does not glance away; he keeps his eyes on the target. He knows the mark and the target, so his punches are planned, deliberate, controlled, and accurate. The Christian knows he is in a spiritual warfare; therefore, he is fighting to conquer and to win the incorruptible prize.

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds" (2 Cor. 10:4).

For 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" (Ephes. 6:12).

This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare" (1 Tim. 1:18).

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses" (1 Tim. 6:12).

No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:4).

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions" (Hebrews 10:31-32).

**1Co 9:27** 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.

**V.** The Christian believer is not to be controlled by his body; he is to control his body.

How?

By simply not giving in to it—by denying the body whatever it craves. It is tough at first, but a person can do it by simply not giving in even if beads of sweat pop out. A person can do it by refusing to give in, by not doing it no matter the pain—by doing exactly what the disciplined athlete does. And in a few days or weeks the most glorious thing happens: the body is conquered, brought under control. The athletes and consistent exercisers of the world know this. Therefore, no minister or believer will ever be excused for not disciplining his body.

The minister or believer masters his own body. The phrase "keep under" means to bruise, to beat back.

Paul says he literally beats back his body and its cravings in order to bring it into subjection. The word subjection (doulagogo) means to enslave, to lead about as a slave.

What wonderful discipline—discipline so often sought after! How desperately we need to learn from Paul!

And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me (Luke 9:23).

And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares (Luke 21:34).

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof (Romans 6:12).

But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof (Romans 13:14).

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh (Galatians 5:16).

And they that are Christ's have crurcified the flesh with the affections and lusts

Ga 5:24

For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body (James 3:2).

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity" (2 Peter 1:5-7).

 1Co 9:27 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.

**VI.** The believer must guard against being disqualified.

1. Paul was concerned that his life measure up to the word that he preached. He feared that he might fail to live what he preached.

Lest that by any means, when I have *preached to others*, I myself should be a castaway

Paul knew the *utter necessity* to live what he preached. He knew that the Lord would not tolerate hypocrisy, not in the pulpit, not in the ministry of the gospel, not in the persons whom He had chosen to be the ministers of His people. They were to preach righteousness, and they were to live righteously, live exactly what they preached.

Paul knew that the Lord just would not allow false profession from His ministers, not for long, not without stern chastisement and judgment coming upon the servant who was living a hypocritical life.

Ro 2:21 Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?

22 Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?

23 Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?

24 For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (Mark 7:6).

They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate (Titus 1:16).

And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer. Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues" (Psalm 78:35-36).

2.  The judgment or chastisement feared by Paul was that of being a castaway. The word "castaway" (*adokimos*) means reprobate, rejected, disqualified, disapproved, unfit, failing to stand the test. What does Paul mean?

Paul is referring to salvation, that when he comes to the end of the race, he sees the possibility of being rejected—if he has not *lived* what he has preached to others.

The very fact that most writers understand Paul to be dealing with salvation speaks loudly and clearly to all ministers of the gospel: we must heed the Scripture.

Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:12-13).