

I CORINTHIANS
Chapter 9:19-27

INTRODUCTION:

In **verses 14-23**, Paul uses the word "**gospel**" nine times. When you take a good look at the life of the apostle Paul you can see how important the gospel was to him. Note – **II Timothy 2:10; Romans 9:3**

The word - "**gospel**" carries the meaning of good news that has been delivered. It is the news that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again from the dead.

In **I Corinthians 15:1-4** - Paul gives us the definition of the gospel - "**Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved...**" **Romans 1:16** tells us that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. He says in - **verse 23** that the life he lived was for the - "**gospel's sake.**"

The purpose of Paul's life was to preach the gospel to the lost and dying world. This was a driving force behind his ministry.

VERSES 19-20:

"For though I be free from all men, yet I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more." Paul was not in bondage to men, nor by what they expected or thought of him, yet he had made himself a slave with one purpose in mind – to "**gain the more.**" The word "**gain**" speaks of "having an advantage." Paul's purpose was to take every opportunity to present the gospel and win people to the Lord Jesus Christ. "I am not concerned about what men think of me, but I have chosen and surrendered myself to be servant of men." Putting it simply he says, "I am the servant of Christ, but Christ has sent me to preach His Word, and I strive to do so to the best of my ability. With the help and power of God I will reach men in their need. In this way I have made myself a "**servant**" to men in order that I may make the gospel clear to all of them." "**Unto the Jew I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews.**"

In the book of **Acts** you will find many examples Paul used from the Old Testament. These examples were used in order to reach the Jews by presenting Christ from scriptures they were familiar with. They were familiar with the Old Testament ceremonies and the laws of God. He based everything upon the Jews' hope of the Messiah, showing how all has been fulfilled in Christ. He dealt with the Jews on a level they understood in order to reach them with the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, when he was speaking to the Gentiles, men who did not know the law of Moses, he put himself on a level with those whom he spoke. He talked of God, the Creator of all things, who gives us - "**rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness,**" - **Acts 14:17**. The God who does all this cannot be an image or an idol made with man's hands; He created the heavens and the earth. Then he undertakes to show how God has sent His son to save men who have sinned against Him; he put the gospel in a way the Gentiles may understand it.

VERSES 22-23:

In reading the biography of Hudson Taylor when he went to China, I learned how he put this verse into practice. Shortly after arriving there as a missionary he broke the trend of the missionaries that were there. He began wearing the clothing and wearing his hair like the Chinese men. You could say that he became as the Chinese to gain the Chinese.

Paul did nothing that would break or disobey any scriptural principle, but when around Jews he behaved as a Jew; when around Gentiles he behaved as a Gentile; and when around the weak he became weak. The purpose of his conduct was to win them.

"To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak." In presenting the Word of God Paul rejoiced to be able to deal with the people to whom he spoke in such a way that they understood what he was saying. He was concerned about the needs of men that he was speaking to, and he preached God's Word to supply those needs. He didn't speak over their heads using words they couldn't understand.

As a minister of Christ, Paul's main purpose was to get to the hearts of men and to give them the Word as they needed it. He did not try to impress people with his eloquence. He gave them the Word of God in order to bring conviction, help, bless, cheer, and make things plain to them, that he - **"might gain the weak"**. In fact, he says - **"I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."** This should be the purpose of preaching God's Word. We have been commissioned to - **"Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."** - **Mark 16:15.**

Every Christian ought to feel Christ's burden for - **"all the world"** and **"every creature,"** He ought to feel sent, like the servants who - **"went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good,"** - **Matthew 22:10.** We are to - **"bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and halt, and the blind,"** - **Luke 14:21.**

VERSE 24:

One of Paul's favorite sources of illustrations was athletics. On several occasions he used an athletic event to illustrate a spiritual truth. The popularity of sports in those days would be much like they are today. Athletics was a religion and athletes were as gods.

Paul used an illustration that he knew people could easily relate to since sports were so popular. Second only to the Olympics, the Isthmian Games were held in Corinth so the athletic illustrations Paul used would have caught the ear of the Corinthian believers. The primary picture that Paul used in this passage of scripture is that of a runner to illustrate the life of a Christian.

Paul uses this analogy in several other passages to illustrate his point of the Christian's responsibility in the work of the Lord. It is also found in **Hebrews 12:1** - **"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."** Also, this illustration of a runner is found in **Philippians 3:14** - **"I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."** Oftentimes, the believer is compared to a runner in a race. Let's take a look at this passage and take notice of truths that every spiritual runner needs to know.

Paul approached the matter of winning souls as an athlete running a race, or competing in the Olympic Games. There is a crown for the winner. He trains; he sacrifices the pleasures, feasts, and free time that others enjoy that he may win the race before him.

VERSE 25:

We get our word "agony" from the word translated - "**striveth.**" The word - "**temperate**" speaks of self-control. The reason the runner puts himself through his painstaking training and discipline is to win the prize. The reason they run is to win. As Paul says - "**Now they do it to obtain a...crown.**"

Paul states the true child of God should view the Christian life in a similar manner, striving to win the prize. However, two differences are pointed out between the Christian race and an earthly contest. In the earthly contest, only one wins the prize; in the Christian life all can win. In the earthly contest, the prize is merely - "**a corruptible crown**"; in the Christian life it is - "**an incorruptible**" crown.

But, there are also similarities in the athlete which the Christian should emulate. The athlete is - "**temperate in all things.**" He abstains from all practices which might hinder his winning the race, even though these things may be harmless in themselves - **I Corinthians 8:13**. In the race God has given us, there must be discipline in order to be a successful runner. It takes discipline to read God's Word daily, to take time to pray daily, and to attend church each time the doors are open. It takes discipline to say 'no' to temptation and the lusts of the flesh. The athlete has a definite purpose in mind, and is always concentrating on that purpose. The same is true for the child of God to keep focused on the things of God.

Therefore, Paul kept guard of his body and its natural desires, lest after he had lead others to Christ, he himself might become a "**castaway**" - "disapproved; disqualified". This statement has nothing to do with his salvation for he knew he was eternally secure and kept by the power of God - **II Timothy 1:12**. The thing he feared was that he might fall to the wayside and lose the reward he so much desired of the Lord Jesus Christ; to hear His voice say - "**Well done, good and faithful servant.**"

VERSE 26:

In **verse 26** - Paul uses two athletic pictures to press home his point. The first is of a runner. He says - "**I therefore so run, not as uncertainly.**" The word - "**uncertainly**" speaks of that which is clear and evident. Paul was saying that he ran with a goal and a purpose - **Philippians 3:14** - "**I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus**". What a challenge to us that we too, should be striving in order to win a heavenly reward.

The second athlete that he used was that of a boxer. He says - "**So fight I, not as one that beateth the air.**" Paul was not just throwing empty and meaningless punches into the air. He was not swinging at shadows; he threw every punch with purpose and aim.

Paul is telling us that we should have a purpose in life, a goal of heavenly rewards. We should run the race that we might obtain a heavenly reward.

VERSE 27:

Notice **verse 27a** - **"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection..."** Paul had learned that the body can be a wonderful servant, but a terrible master. When it came to earning heavenly rewards he knew that his body could either help or hurt him. Therefore, he took certain steps to make sure his body became a servant rather than a master.

He used a couple of interesting words to describe how he approached his body. The word - **"keep"** literally means, "to hit under the eye, to give his body a black eye, hit in the face." You could say that he was talking about knocking himself out. He approached his body, with the will and wishes of the body, as an enemy to being a good runner. Therefore, he landed a punch that knocked out the body. In other words, his flesh was no longer the dominant force in his life.

He also said that he brought his body - **"into subjection."** The word - **"subjection"** speaks of being a slave. He made his body a slave to spiritual desires rather than allowing his body to make him a slave to fleshly desires.

When it comes to the body this matter of spiritual discipline is essential to running a race that will reap heavenly rewards. The downfall of many Christians is letting the body dictate what they do rather than the Spirit. **Galatians 5:17** Paul said - **"For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."** Paul described two internal occupants that are fighting each other for the control of our life. In **Romans 7:21** - he described it as a law within him. The flesh wants to be in charge, but at the same time the Spirit wants supremacy, so they are fighting for the control of our lives. The flesh wants to get us to do certain things, and so does the Spirit.

The problem is many believers let the flesh be in control. Note an example: It is Sunday morning. The flesh says, "Don't go to church today. Stay in and rest after all you need it we have had a hard week. "If the flesh is in control you will turn off the alarm clock and go back to sleep and miss church. But on the other hand, if the Spirit is in control, it will ignore the recommendation of the flesh and do what God wants you to do. You will crawl out of bed, stumble to the shower, and get ready for church.

Let me give you another example. You find yourself in a tempting situation. The flesh says, "Buy that book," "Rent that movie," "Take that drink," or "Go ahead and do it. Nobody will ever know." The flesh cries out, "Fulfill me, satisfy me." But, if the Spirit is in control, you will do what pleases God, not what pleases the flesh. In fact, Paul said in **Galatians 5:16** - **"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."**

What I am talking about is making your body your servant, not you being a servant to your body. It is giving the body a black eye and bringing it into subjection.

There is an interesting verse - **I Thessalonians 5:23** with an interesting order found in the verse. Paul says - **"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."** The soul is the seat of our emotions, the place where we make decisions. Out of habit we say, "body, soul, and spirit." But the divine order is, "Spirit, soul, and body." It is not the body dictating to the soul what it should do, but the Spirit dictating what the soul should do.

Paul says - ***"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."*** The word - ***"castaway"*** speaks of someone being disqualified or disapproved. Paul pictures himself serving in two roles.

He also saw himself as a runner in the race. When he spoke of himself as becoming a - ***"castaway"*** he saw himself as a runner being disqualified. He did not want to be one that called others to run, but failed to be a good runner himself.

How about you? Do you have a desire to win a heavenly reward? Do you have a fear of becoming a castaway? In each case, our answer ought to be YES I will to live, and keep my body under subjection in order to be a witness for the Lord, and hear the words "well done" receiving a crown of reward.

I CORINTHIANS 9:19-27
Study Guide

1. How many times was the word "**gospel**" used in this lesson? Why? What is the gospel?
I Corinthians 15:1-4
2. What was the purpose of Paul's life?
3. What did Paul mean when he said – "**I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more I might gain the Jews.**"
4. In what ways did Paul present the gospel to the Jews and Gentiles? Why?
5. What is the one thing Paul wanted most when he spoke to people about Christ?
6. When speaking to men, he wanted to give them the Word of God as they _____!
7. One of Paul's favorite sources of illustrations was _____. Why?
8. When Paul used the analogy of an athlete, what point did he desire to show?
9. The word "**temperate**" speaks of ____ - _____?
10. The athletes of the world strive for a _____ but a child of God run or labors for the Lord to win _____.
11. Explain the phrase - "**temperate in all things.**" What is this so important in the life of a Christians?.
12. What does the word - "**castaway**" mean? Why was Paul concerned about becoming one?
13. Paul was saying in **verse 26** that he ran with a _____ and _____. Give a Bible verse to prove your answer.
14. Paul had learned that the body can be a wonderful _____, but a terrible _____.
15. Explain **Galatians 5:16-17**.
16. What did Paul mean when he said he brought his body – "**into subjection?**"
17. The problem is many believers let the _____ be in control.
18. How about you? Do you have a desire to win a heavenly reward? Do you have a fear of becoming a castaway?