

THE INSIDE LOOK AT A MINISTER (PART II): GREAT DISCIPLINE REQUIRED 1 CORINTHIANS 09:24–27

Introduction

This passage is one of the great challenges of Scripture, a challenge that every minister and believer should memorize and keep ever before their minds. Paul is still giving an inside look into his heart and ministry, how he viewed the Christian life and ministry. But this passage is *unique* in its description, for it describes Paul's feelings about the Christian life in terms of athletes, the runner and the boxer. No true minister or 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.

Dramatically, Paul says that the Christian minister and the Christian believer can be compared to athletes. *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. Closely observe his points.

- I. He enters the race to run and win (v. 24).
- II. He strenuously disciplines and controls himself (v. 25).
- III. He runs to obtain an incorruptible, eternal crown (v. 25).
- IV. He runs and fights with certainty and without distraction (v. 26).
- V. He masters his own body (v. 27).
- VI. He guards against disqualification (v. 27).

I. *1 Corinthians 09:24 Victory of the Christian Race*

The minister or believer enters the Christian race and he enters 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 and running hard:

- => Walking fast is unacceptable.
 - => Jogging is unacceptable.
 - => Lagging behind is unacceptable.
 - => Showing little concern for the finish line is unacceptable.
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The point is this: the minister and layman alike 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.

1 Cor 9:24 *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.*

Gal 5:7 *You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?*

Phil 2:16 *As you hold out the word of life — in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labour for nothing.*

Phil 3:14 *I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

Heb 12:1 *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.*

2 Tim 4:7-8 *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

II. **1 Corinthians 09:25** *Christian Race and Discipline*

The minister (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 minister or believer is to do no less. He must be just as disciplined as the athlete. The word “competes” (*agonizomai*) means agony. He disciplines himself to the point of pain. The implied 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 minister or believer controls his body. His body is actually the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Rom 12:1-2 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of*

worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

1 Cor 6:19-20 *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.*

Prov 23:2 *And put a knife to your throat if you are given to gluttony.*

Prov 25:16 *If you find honey, eat just enough — too much of it, and you will vomit.*

2. The minister or believer controls his mind and thoughts.

Rom 8:5-7 *Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.*

2 Cor 10:3-5 *For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

Mat 5:28 *“But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”*

3. The minister or believer controls his spirit.

Gal 5:22-23 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

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

1 Cor 15:58 *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.*

Gal 6:2 *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.*

Gal 6:10 *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

Eph 6:7 *Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men.*

Heb 12:28 *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.*

Psa 2:11 *Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.*

III. *1 Corinthians 09:25 The Incorruptible, Eternal Crown*

The minister or believer runs to obtain an *incorruptible, eternal crown*. The runners in an athletic contest run to obtain a passing fame and a corruptible crown or trophy. The athletes in Paul's day ran for a crown or wreath of olive or pine leaves. Their fame and crown were the same as with our athletes: they both passed ever so quickly. However, the crown and fame of the genuine Christian runner will never pass away. His crown and fame are incorruptible, eternal. He shall live and be rewarded with an eternal fame and with the most real and valued crowns imaginable.

1 Cor 9:25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

2 Tim 4:8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

1 Pet 5:4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. (cp. 1 Pt. 1:3-4)

Rev 3:11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.

Rev 4:10 The twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say.

IV. *1 Corinthians 09:26 A Race Run with Certainty*

The minister or believer runs and fights with certainty and without distraction. Effort is necessary, effort that sacrifices and strains to the point of hurting. But note: he is 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.

Note the second example. 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 (minister and layman) knows he is in a spiritual warfare; therefore, he is fighting to conquer and to win the incorruptible, eternal prize.

2 Cor 10:4 *The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.*

Eph 6:12 *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

1 Tim 1:18 *Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight.*

1 Tim 6:12 *Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*

2 Tim 2:4 *No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs — he wants to please his commanding officer.*

Heb 10:31-32 *It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering.*

V. 1 Corinthians 09:27 Christian Race — Minister

The Christian minister or 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 word “beat” means to bruise, to keep under. Paul says he literally beats back his body and its cravings in order to bring it into subjection. The word slave (doulagogo) means to put in subjection, to lead about as a slave.

Thought 1. What wonderful discipline — discipline so often sought after! How desperately we need to learn from Paul!

Luke 9:23 *Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”*

Luke 21:34 *“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.”*

Rom 6:12 *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.*

Rom 13:14 *Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

1 Cor 6:12 *“Everything is permissible for me” — but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible for me” — but I will not be mastered by anything.*

1 Cor 9:27 *No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*

Gal 5:16 *So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

Gal 5:24 *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.*

James 3:2 *We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.*

2 Pet 1:5-7 *For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.*

VI. 1 Corinthians 09:27 Guards Against Disqualification

The minister or believer guards against disqualification. Note two facts.

1. Paul was concerned that his life measure up to his preaching. He feared that he might fail to live what he preached. This is what he means by being disqualified. Note *exactly* what he says:

“So that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” (v. 27)

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.

Rom 2:21-24 *You, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who brag*

about the law, do you dishonour God by breaking the law? As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles [unbelievers] because of you."

Mat 7:21 *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."*

Mark 7:6 *He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "'These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me."*

Titus 1:16 *They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.*

Psa 78:35-36 *They remembered that God was their Rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer. But then they would flatter him with their mouths, lying to him with their tongues.*

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

⇒ Most writers think that 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.

Titus 2:12-13 *It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.*

Now, what does Paul mean? Five things are sure about Paul's teaching in Scripture.

First, Paul definitely pictured himself in a life-long struggle for salvation. The great Greek scholar A.T. Robertson says that Paul alone uses the Greek word adokimos in a moral sense in the New Testament, and Paul definitely says that he subjects his body and keeps it under control lest he be a *castaway [disqualified]*. Look at Paul's use of the word. It stands as a beneficial warning to us all — to live what we preach, and profess and live it with the utmost diligence and effort. (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. 4. , 1931, p. 150.)

Rom 1:28 *Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.*

1 Cor 9:27 *No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified [adokimos] for the prize.*

2 Cor 13:5-7 *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you — unless, of course, you fail the test?*

And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test but that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed.

2 Tim 3:8 *Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth — men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected.*

Titus 1:16 *They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.*

Second, Paul definitely pictured himself as having to struggle against sin throughout life, and he struggled against sin for two reasons:

=> to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Phil 3:8, 11 *What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ...and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. (cp. v. 7-15)*

=> to conquer the flesh (sinful nature).

Gal 5:16-24 *So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.*

Third, Paul was perfectly assured of his salvation; he was perfectly assured that he would run the race and run it well. He was persuaded of two things:

=> that nothing in heaven or earth, in fact, nothing present and nothing to come, could ever separate him from the love of God.

Rom 8:35, 38-39 *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?...For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

=> that the Lord was able to keep him until the day of redemption.

2 Tim 1:12 *That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.*

Rom 8:29 *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brothers.*

2 Th 3:3 *But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. (cp. 1 Pet. 1:5; Jude 24; Rev. 3:10)*

Fourth, Paul was convinced that only those who walked in the Spirit and were committed to a deadly struggle against sin were saved and given the absolute assurance of their salvation (see Rom. 8:1-17).

Fifth, Paul was not perfect, and he confessed the fact, confessing that he was far from perfect. Therefore, until he was made perfect, he was going to struggle, follow, press and strive for perfection; that is, to be conformed to the image of Christ.

Phil 3:12-14 *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus [to be conformed to His image, conformed to perfection].*

Now, having studied all this, one thing needs to be observed about what Paul has said.

- ⇒ Paul was perfectly assured of his salvation and of God's power to keep him safe until the day of redemption.
- ⇒ But at the same time Paul was deeply conscious of a deadly struggle against sin.

Paul's point is clear and easily seen: it is the minister or lay believer who is carnal, hypocritical, complacent, self-indulgent, fleshly, worldly and prideful who has doubts and has to suppress and ignore his doubts. The believer who is assured of his salvation is constantly aware that the proof of his salvation is fruit or good works. He knows that if his life is not genuine, then he not only *can be*, but he *will be* disqualified, counted useless, put on the shelf, and cast away. Therefore, he runs and runs the race of the Christian life, and he runs to win. He keeps his body under control. (See *Sin, Believer's Judgement*, 1 Jn. 5:16.)

Mat 7:16-17 *"By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit."*

Mat 13:8 *"Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop — a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."*

John 15:2 *“He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”*

John 15:5 *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”*

James 2:17, 20 *In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead... You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?*

James 2:24 *You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. ■*