

1Corinthians 18-06-17b

Let's continue our study now in 1 Corinthians chapter 9. We're looking at this section in some detail. For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant. We saw in the earlier part of this chapter that just up above, I have used none of these things in verse 15, the privileges that are his by right, that are his and associated with his office.

And Paul says, I have not availed myself of these things, though I could. He said, the part of my ministry that is compulsory, which is I must be an apostle. Woe to me if I do not preach.

Woe to me if I do not preach. He doesn't say woe to you if you don't preach. We're not all apostles.

And this truth and this observation has been largely lost in the church. Can we all shine the light of the glory of the gospel of Christ? Yes. Should we? Yes.

Should we shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation? Should we glorify our father who is in heaven? Let your light so shine before men that they see your good works and glorify your father? Absolutely. But to preach, to aggressively go and win is not for everybody. Is there a gift for personal evangelism? Absolutely.

I know people who have it, and they're good at it, and God blesses them in it. But it would be no more appropriate for them to project their gift on all Christians and say, everybody should be doing what I'm doing, than it would be for me to say, you should all be studying and teaching the word of God. You should all be manifesting the gift of faith or the gift of whatever it may be.

The gift of helps. Everybody should be a helper. Not everybody's in a position to help.

Some people have a gift of financial contribution, the women who supported the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. They may have had an industry of their own. They may have been a grower of flax or a seller of purple, or they might have talked to their husbands and said, dear, I want to support this Yeshua from Nazareth, I believe he's the Messiah.

And their husband said, honey, take however many shekels you want and send it along. But they were the means. They enabled the Lord Jesus to have an itinerant ministry, to eat.

He often didn't have a place to lay his head, but there was a box in which they had funds, so that this group of 13 individuals could travel and eat, and not constantly be looking for someone to provide them their next meal. They had some wherewithal. And it's a wonderful thing for believers to provide for other believers who are traveling, who do communicate, who are doing missions work or ministry work.

I got a chance to talk to some of the disaster relief people that are associated with the Southern Baptist Denomination. They do a wonderful work. They're volunteers, largely.

There's only a skeleton paid staff. I told the one guy, he was part of that. He said, I'm one of the few that actually has a paid position.

They're like the INI. They're like the active duty people that support a reserve unit during the month when there's no reserves there. And then the reserves come in once a month.

But this staff has been doing the paperwork, maintaining the communication, keeping the drill center functioning and so on, processing records and doing all of the things that enable the entire reserve unit to do what they do. There's a skeleton, small staff of active duty. Well, the same thing with the Baptist Men of Texas and some of the other disaster relief entities that are supported as volunteers.

When they go, their plane ticket is paid. Their hotel room is paid. And they go and they clean up a flood.

They dish out food and water and essential services. They are there as a part of that response to a crisis. And it's a wonderful thing.

They've got a ministry gift. They love to do it. God has given them means, motive and opportunity to do it.

And there will be stars in their crown. They are sacrificial. They are beneficial.

They do it as unto the Lord. They care. And they've got a unique opportunity to express their spiritual growth and their love for the Lord Jesus in that way.

I can't do that. God has given me a different assignment. I have different opportunities.

I have different gifts. I have different training. I probably would be very inefficient at that, where some of these guys are just the exact right thing at the exact right time.

So many people are that way. There are people that are that way in music. There are people that are that way in thoughtfulness and support and provision when there is a time of stress or a time of crisis.

Everybody has a gift. What did Jesus say? The whole body is... Actually, through the apostle, he said, the whole body is not an eye. The whole body is not a hand.

The whole body is not a foot. One part of the body can't say to another, I have no need of you, right? The whole body, fitly joined together, functions as the presence of Christ. How many times have we seen this? So when Paul, the apostle, says, I become all things to all men in order that I might gain them, the apostolic function in Matthew 28, the apostolic function in Acts 1 and 2 and following is to gain.

That's what the apostles do. They are the gainers. Now, they're all perished, to my knowledge, unless John is floating around somewhere.

What is it to you if he lived till I come? Maybe he is. I doubt it, but I don't know. But how do the apostles fulfill their function? Jesus predicted would continue until the end of the age and until the end of the world.

How do they do it? You're looking at it. It's in your lap. It is the record of the ministry and the record of the communication that they produced and the churches that they started that have maintained the preservation.

You think, well, what about Thaddeus? I don't see any books by Thaddeus in here. How did he fulfill his great commission? The non-writing apostles disciplined believers and founded churches and created the first generation of believers who recognized and compiled and preserved these scriptures. Their work is unseen and unknown.

Did you ever wonder why it's only basically the big three? You've got Peter, Paul, and John, not Mary. Mary did a wonderful thing, but she's not a writing apostle. You've got Peter, Paul, and John as apostles.

What about the other eight? We wouldn't expect much from Judas, but there was another Judas. There was another Simon. So what about those guys? What does it tell you? Much of what we as believers do in the function of our gift is going to be, as they used to put on tombstones, on rescuing remains from battlefields, known but to God.

It's been lost to history. It's not preserved in our scriptures, not preserved even in the written record of the early centuries of the church. But I promise you, when Jesus said, you 11 will be witnesses unto me, there is an invisible supporting work that James the Less and the other Simon and James that got wiped out right at the beginning have accomplished in establishing the church that preserved what we do have.

And the work that they did, the second and third generations of believers that came from their discipling counts. And God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith, your labor of love, and your encouragement of hope, right? God is not going to forget. The world may forget.

The church may forget. God doesn't forget. Don't think that you're not important.

Don't think that what you do doesn't count. You're not an apostle. So don't expect and don't measure yourself and don't allow others to measure you according to the standard of gain that an apostle would have.

You're not an apostle. Measure yourself. Judge yourself.

Examine yourself to see if you're in the faith. Judge yourself so that you're not judged according to your opportunities, your gifts, your role, your function, your place. Do not do what the church at large does and say you're fruitless because you've not become all things to all people and you've not won anybody or won anybody lately or won enough.

There's something wrong with you because you're not reproducing. You're born to reproduce. This is the whole thing of the Navigators.

You know, born to reproduce. It was Dawson Trotman or somebody who wrote this book. Well, sorry, no.

You are born to bear fruit. But how many different kinds of fruit are there? Only apples? Only grapes? Only figs? There's all kinds of fruit. What does it say in Psalm 1? The one who doesn't walk in the counsel of the ungodly or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of the scornful who delights himself in the law of the Lord and reflects on it and thinks about it day and night.

What's he like? He is like a tree planted by the rivers of water who brings forth his fruit in his season. Every tree is different. All the trees need the living water.

All of the trees need to be soaking up that which God provides and they bear their own fruit. Do not let anyone intimidate you, belittle you, make you feel less or somehow problematic or unfruitful because you have not evangelized lately. God the Holy Spirit is the evangelist.

Jesus didn't say, I'm going away but I will send you a fleet of evangelists and when they come, they will convince the world of sin and righteousness and judgment because I won't be here but my evangelists will make sure that everybody hears the word. Who comes? Who convicts? God the Holy Spirit. We were talking about baptism on the break and that Matthew 28, 19, the apostles baptizing them in the name is that an injunction to water baptism and you speak the name as you dunk them to some sort of a public profession or whatever? Well, what if the public's not there? What if there's only a handful of people? What if you got dunked in a creek? What if it was a swimming pool and there were only six people there? What if there's a swimming pool and there's only two of you there? How is that a public profession? Shouldn't you go down to the city fountain next to the courthouse and let the whole world see it? If that's the function of water baptism, why don't we do it publicly? Why is it in a baptistry? You got to be inside the church and watching the inside there.

If it's supposed to be a public proclamation, well, it's only a public proclamation of the church. What for? I've seen countless baptisms. It didn't do anything for me.

I get more entertained by the mechanics of it than the spiritual connotation, if any. What does it mean to baptize? Let me suggest to you something that my mom brought up on the break, which I think was very good. You remember when Jesus went down to the Jordan and John was there? And Jesus came down to be baptized and John said, whoa, it ought to be the other way around.

You ought to be dunking me in water. What did Jesus say? You need to allow this. It is necessary for us to fulfill all righteousness.

The break over between the significance of water baptism, the baptism of John, and baptism in

and of the spirit is that moment. Because Jesus is the bridge between the Old Testament and the New. He's the bridge between the age of Israel and the age of the church.

What baptism comes first when he's standing there with John? Baptism in water. That's the Old Testament fulfilling of all righteousness. I've not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it, right? But when he comes up out of the water, having accomplished the water baptism, what happens? He is baptized with the spirit.

The spirit descends on him like a dove. And what did John say? I baptize you with water. He will baptize you with water and with the spirit.

Is that what he said? What is the one coming after me who's shoelatched and I'm not worthy to unloose? What's he going to baptize with? The spirit and fire. You're going to be one or the other. You're either going to be in the realm of the spirit of God, or you're going to be in the realm of the judgment of fire.

Fire is designed to consume and destroy. So, when those disciples of John that Paul meets later on, and he says, what baptism did you receive? Well, we know only the baptism of John. They meet an apostle.

Once they meet the apostle, now have other believers been circulating around there? How did Paul know to find them? But what happens when they meet the apostle? They are baptized with the Holy Spirit. When Peter speaks on the day of the baptism, when they're all gathered in one place, what happens? The spirit descends like tongues of fire. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

The spirit descends like tongues of fire on the group. The apostles are present, Peter and John and some of the rest. And what happens? You have the day of Pentecost.

That's the baptism. Does it say anything about all trooping down to the Jordan and dunking them? No. Baptism, and I read an article recently where a scholar made the case that all baptism in Acts is spirit baptism with the exception of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch.

And what are they reading? Not an epistle of Paul, not a message from Peter. They're reading Isaiah and he's being introduced to the Messiah of Israel because in that day, the apostle to the Gentiles has not yet been commissioned. Right? It's a transitional time.

It's still a Jewish thing. And there is some water baptism going on to introduce people to the all Jewish church. And what does Philip do? He doesn't say, you don't need this water.

Wait for the spirit to come. The spirit is present. How does Philip leave that venue? He doesn't catch a taxi.

The spirit snatches him up like Ezekiel and whisks him away. Right? But it's transitional. So say all of that to say this, though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all.

Now, what is his message to the Corinthians? Does he say you all should be going out and trying to gain people the way I gain them? What is the imperative? What was the imperative? You know, we miss the imperative in Matthew 28, 19. The imperative is not to go. The imperative is not to baptize.

The imperative is to make disciples. How do you make a disciple? I can try two different means. I will dunk this guy in water.

I will immerse this guy in the apostolic scriptures of the New Testament. Which one do you think is going to become a disciple quicker? How easy is it to dunk someone? How easy is it to disciple someone by immersing them in the truth about the Father and the truth about the Son and the truth about the Holy Spirit? Which one can I check off on my box and go my merry way more easily? Typically, the right way is the harder way. The right way is the way of endurance and patience and consistency and faithfulness and obedience.

Not a one-time experience, right? So which one do you think the Lord Jesus was commissioning his apostles to accomplish? Teaching them to observe the things that I have taught you. That's how you immerse them. That's how you baptize them.

That's how you make disciples. The only imperative in those two verses is make disciples. How do you do it? You're immersing them in the name of the Father.

You're immersing them in the name of the Son. You're immersing them in the name of the Holy Spirit. God incorporated the three in one and you are teaching them how to be obedient.

And I will be with you until the end of the age. So how do we apply what Paul is saying here to the Corinthians? He says, to the Jews, I became as a Jew, to those who are under the law, as under the law. Now, what's the difference? Who's under the law except the Jews? Is this not redundant? I became a Jew to the Jews.

I became under the law to those who are under the law. Is that just repetitive? Are those the same? Are they synonymous? What do you think? What's the difference in being Jewish and being under the law? Let me put it this way. How much, remember Topal and the fiddler on the roof? How much of what even religious Jews practice is actually in the law? And how much of it is tradition, teaching for doctrines the traditions of men to those who are observing traditions associated with Jewish culture, Jewish identity.

I respect that and I conform myself. I don't trouble the waters. I don't tell them, well, you know, you're teaching his doctrines, the traditions of men, when my goal is to gain them.

Can Paul talk about that later on once they are gained, when they need to grow? Sure, but in his initial contact, what is he doing? I'm not going to make an issue of your unscriptural traditions, right? To those who are continuing to try to observe the law in its original intent and sense, that's a different thing. Jews, remember the term Jew didn't come up until after they were released by the Persians. There was no such thing as a Jew in the days of the Israelites or even

in the days of the captivity.

They become Jews in that interim period, that intertestamental period. And in the New Testament, you have them as Judaeum, those from Judah. It's after the Northern Kingdom is gone.

It's after the Southern Kingdom is gone. So there is this freight and weight of culture and tradition. So to those who are Jews, I become, genomai, I change into.

Genomai to become is to change in some way. So Paul, what he might normally do, he does not do around those people, so as not to make an issue out of something that is not an essential. Now, he's not gonna say, oh, that Jesus wasn't the Christ or something that they might hold as a traditional view.

What is he going to do? In all of the non-essential areas, he is going to ensure that those remain non-essential and non-issues. I'm not gonna fight skirmishes. I'm gonna focus on the importance of recognizing Jesus Christ, the gospel.

I communicate to you what was delivered to me. Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures and that he was buried and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures. If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, if you believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, by the way, these are all essential components of the gospel.

He says in Acts 16.31, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. Believe what? Even the demons believe and tremble. Believe what? You've got to acknowledge and Paul says verbally that Jesus is the Lord.

What is the Lord? That's the Old Testament name for God. If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and you believe in your heart, what? That he was the savior of the world, that he died for your sins, that he's a dead sacrifice, that God has raised him from the dead. The resurrection is an essential, irreducible component of the gospel.

If you just teach that Jesus was a wonderful guy and you ought to follow him because he had the golden rule, you're not preaching the gospel. He was killed and God raised him from the dead. He is declared to be the son of God by the resurrection of the dead.

The Holy Spirit raised him and that's the evidence, that's the proof, that's the case that he's the son of God. Believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead. This, by the way, is the name of the Father, this is the name of the Son, this is the name of the Holy Spirit.

If you, if I name, somebody was, oh, I know, we watched a piece of light comedy and one or two of the jokes were dependent on knowing who somebody is. Martin Short mentioned a guy's name. I don't know who he is.

And so the humor was lost on me. The crowd laughed uproariously. I didn't know what they

were talking about because I'm not, you know, completely plugged into the culture, I guess.

But I understood the name. I heard the name mentioned. But if you don't know who he is and what he's notable for, what his reputation is, you lose the meaning of the message.

To baptize someone into the name is to acquaint them with who that person is. The person of the Father, the person of the Son, the person of the Holy Spirit. That's how you make a disciple.

You've got to understand the role and the function and the meaning of all three of those personages who make up the Trinity. So, that I might gain the more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews.

Get them past their cultural affinities and their traditional understandings and get them to recognize Christ. To those who are under the law, this is not the word under in Greek. The word for law, as you will recognize in Greek, is *nomos*.

N-O-M-O-S, *nomos*. This is the word *anomos*. Alpha privative, they call it.

If I say you are aerobic, that means you've got air, right? You've got aero. If I say it's anaerobic, what does that mean? No, not enough air. A means the negative.

So, if I say *nomos*, this would be somebody who is or has or obeys the law. If I say *anomos*, in English we say lawless. To those who are lawless.

Now, Paul says, to those who are *nomos*, I became *nomos*. To those who recognize the legitimate law, I became one who recognizes the legitimate law. I didn't make an issue out of, well, you know you're not under law but under grace.

Not until they are gained. It's not a part of the gospel. It comes after.

There's a huge tradition of telling people that they've got to turn from their sins in order to be saved. It's not what the Bible says. Get saved, then turn from your sins.

Turning from your sins is not a part of salvation. Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ is salvation. Believing that God raised him from the dead.

Believing that he's the son of God, the Lord. That's a part of salvation. Well, you can't be saved unless you quit doing X, Y, or Z. Not the gospel.

Paul doesn't make an issue out of law. He doesn't say, well, you know you're gay and until you disabuse yourself of gaiety, until you reject and transfer yourself out of that, you know, you can't really be saved. It's false.

Don't make an issue out of things that aren't an issue when it comes to salvation. And Paul in particular, as someone who is tasked as an apostle with communicating the gospel, is careful not to make an issue of that which is not an issue. So, to those who are without law, verse 21,

this is anomos, lawless.

Now, you have to be careful when you say, well, to those who are lawless, I become lawless. Well, lawless in what sense? You know, store robbing, prostitute visiting, you know, rebels with a cause, and you know, rejecting and flouting authority and all the rest of it. He is careful to say, when I say I am lawless, I am not anomos to God.

I don't excuse myself from God's law. He's talking about the law of Moses. And he says, I'm not without law toward God, but I am anomos to Christ.

The law of Moses has been replaced with the law of Christ. What is the law of Christ? It's the law of love. That's his case in this section of Corinthians.

What used to be mandated by rule is now encouraged by the principle of love. I could do a thing, but love constrains me. And I will control myself.

This is all about self-control motivated by love. So he says, I'm not lawless in the sense of, I respect no authority and no rules, but the old law has been replaced with a higher law. You give little kids rules, don't run in the house, don't wrestle in the living room, make your bed, brush your teeth.

My mother doesn't call me up in the mornings now and say, Sam, brush your teeth. Sam, clean up your room. Sam, make your bed.

Why is that? It's not that I don't necessarily need some guidance or some encouragement, but I'm grown. I have a higher law. I have self-discipline.

I have self-control. I don't want to run around leaving a mess for my wife to clean up. I don't want to be a burden on people because I'm too lazy to do my own work.

And so there is a law of love that has superseded the external, which was designed to teach me the importance of these things. You need to do these and there's a reason. Brush your teeth out of consideration other people you might talk to.

Make your bed out of consideration for somebody who's going to have to make it if you don't. Pick up after yourself. There is a law of love that has superseded this external and Paul is talking about that here.

The law of Christ is higher and greater than this mere set of rules that was an example and a teaching tool until we matured. So I might gain those who are anomos. I'm not going to make an issue out of it.

Now look at verse 22. To the weak, I became as weak. This is the Greek word *asthenia* and it means it's used for illness.

It means lack of normal function. Lack of self-sufficiency is a good way to put it. When you're ill

or disabled or have an injury or a condition you can be insufficient of yourself and he says to the weak I became as weak that I might gain the weak.

Now you remember that we're talking to the Corinthians here. Keep your finger here and turn back again. There's a reason why we read chapter two.

I brethren when I came to you did not come with power. Look at verse three. I was with you in asthenia.

So this is sort of a sideways rejoinder to those who say Paul is weak in his presence and he's not a legitimate apostle. We don't have to pay attention to him. What does he say? When I was among you it wasn't that you had the law as a problem like the Galatians.

It wasn't that you had the tradition as a problem like the Jews. You had a problem that you couldn't function to help yourselves. You were insufficient of yourselves and I didn't make an issue out of your lack of strength.

I was with you for nearly two years but I was gentle. I was soothing. I was a comforter not a rebuker.

I was an encourager not a demander. I was with you in weakness. He tells them back here I was with you in weakness, in fear and in trembling.

Now was Paul weak and fearful and shaking in his boots by nature? Not at all. But he became that in Corinth to not sidetrack them or spook them or deflect them from his message. It's part of his apostolic function to identify what is the issue and what is not.

And that's what he did among them. And if anybody that was paying close attention realizes, oh wait he's talking about us here. When he says to the weak, I became as weak.

That's why he finishes up with this because he's still making his case. Don't think that because I didn't raise my voice and wave a big apostolic authority stick in your presence that I'm not an apostle or that I don't have authority to deliver this message. I was gentle among you because you were a group that needed gentleness.

That was the best way to gain you. But don't use that as an excuse to think that you can just walk all over me and ignore me. I am in fact an apostle.

And now that you have been gained, you'd better remember it. Same thing with scripture in general. This is the apostolic witness to us.

And we need to heed the scriptures. You cannot obey the law of Christ if you don't know what the law of Christ is. And that's contained in the apostolic witness in the New Testament.

The law of Christ is not in the Old Testament. It's in the New. Who wrote this scripture? Either an apostle or someone who was the amanuensis for an apostle.

Mark was the amanuensis for Peter. Luke was the amanuensis for Paul. And God the Holy Spirit inspired all of this.

John was an apostle. Peter was an apostle. So this is the apostolic witness that Jesus commissioned in Matthew 28.

That he predicted in Acts 1.8. You will be my witnesses till the end of the world to the end of the age. Until. So we need to recognize that there are times when we are strong.

There is strong witness from scripture. There's time when we are weak. And there is comfort and encouragement in the scriptures.

Through the comfort and encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope. Hope isn't drilled into us with a stick. But obedience might be.

Whom the Lord loves, he chastens. And scourges every son whom he receives. But everything's not scourging.

There is a time. There is a place. There is an area of life where we need a whack with a stick.

There are other places when we need comfort and encouragement and the fleshing out of our hope. So that's what he's talking about here. I do this for the gospel's sake that I may be a partaker, a co-partaker of it.

And you notice you is in italics there. Now very quickly, we're about to finish. This next section in My New King James, if yours is like mine, it's labeled what? The uninspired subtitle here in my Bible says, striving for a crown.

Is that what yours says? Striving for a crown? Anybody else got a New King James? Am I the only one? Maybe mine's just better than yours. Mine's a Thompson chain reference. But I think these, I thought these were in all the New King James.

Anyway, mine is labeled striving for a crown. Not a bad subtitle here. Verse 24.

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. Everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things, is self-controlled, is disciplined in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.

Therefore I run thus, not with uncertainty, thus I fight, not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. Now, there's a fairly apparent meaning to this on the surface, but I have one word for you, and it's not plastics.

It is pronouns. Read this again to yourself. I'll give you about 10 seconds.

Read those verses and watch the pronouns. By the way, in verse 24, just to help you out, it's very evident in Greek, not so in English. The you there is plural, second person plural.

Do you all not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? You all run in such a way that you all may obtain it. Second person plural, okay? Everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. They do it to obtain a perishable crown, but what happened to the pronoun here? But we, for an imperishable crown, Paul has shifted from the second person plural to the first person plural.

See that? You all need to run in such a way as to obtain the crown. We have an imperishable crown. Therefore, verse 26, I run thus.

Not with uncertainty. Thus I fight, not as one who beats the air, but I discipline my body. I bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

You see the movement there? Paul talks about those, as a metaphor, who are running a race, or as an illustration, perhaps. Those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize. Now, is he saying that Christian life is a competition, and we're all going to strive, but Jesus is going to come to the judgment, and he's going to say, well, you know, Sam, you did pretty well, but this guy over here did better.

He's going to get the prize. You get nothing. Or you get second place, or third place, and also a participant.

I rode one time in a race. I was in a crew situation, and I was in a shell, and we had a race, and it's what you might call intramural or whatever. It's midshipmen rowing against themselves, other midshipmen, and it's called the bottom of the weems.

Kenny knows all about this. He participated in it, and I was in it once, and I've got a picture of my hands afterward, and the skin is just ripped and torn off, because I wasn't really an oarsman, and I took a picture of my own hands, because they were so torn up, and it's black and white. It doesn't really show the excitement that was my hands at that point, but I got a ribbon, and it's in my scrapbook, and it says bottom of the weems, and it's basically a participant ribbon.

You know, you were there. Here's your ribbon, you know. Great, but, you know, there is a trophy.

There is a prize. There is a, you know, when crews defeat one another and come in first, they get the jerseys of the other guys. My roommate's got a Harvard crew jersey, which is a coveted thing, because Harvard very seldom loses, but Navy out rode and out distanced and defeated Harvard on the water, and so he's got that prize.

Well, there were a lot of other boats that attempted to achieve that, but only one got the prize, but Paul's point is not, and this is the danger of using a metaphor. People will take impertinent

parts of it and try to make them pertinent, and he's not saying anything about, well, there's only going to be one prize. There's only going to be one white stone and one new name.

He's saying, do you not know that these other people, they've only got one crown to compete for, and it's perishable. We all strive, and we can all achieve an imperishable crown. There's not just one.

You can drop the, you know, the comparison of how temporary and perishable any given race is. Somebody raced in 1938 in Boston and won something. Who knows now? Guy's probably long gone, but we strive for an imperishable crown, so he says, run in such a way that you may obtain it, and it's a subjunctive idea.

It's potential. It's possible for you, and it doesn't matter what anybody else is doing. He's shifting away from the limitations and the perishability and the temporality of actual races.

Everybody was familiar with the games. They had Corinthian games. They were like the Athenian games.

They were kind of like Olympics, and they were very famous in the day, and Paul is drawing on that, and he says, you all know this. You've seen the games. You've seen the races, and all these guys kill themselves to get this one little wreath that's going to wilt.

You know, they just got the laurel wreath, and, you know, a week later, the thing is pathetic. He says there is reward for everyone who runs, but how does someone run? Everyone who competes, verse 25, is temperate. Remember the old King James version of the fruit of the spirit, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, self-control.

Being temperate is self-control. I could do a thing, but I'm not going to. I may have an impulse.

I may have a desire. I may have an opportunity, but I am temperate. I have control of myself, and it does not drive me, and it does not control me.

Remember earlier, Paul said, all things are lawful, but I will not be controlled by anything. I have self-control. I can deny myself that which I might want or think I need or would enjoy out of some higher principle.

This is what is greatly lost in our culture today. Righteousness now is determined by what makes me feel the best and gratifies me the most. And if I don't feel particularly stimulated or pleased or made to feel the best about myself by this particular thing, then it's bad.

The standard of righteousness is, how does it make me feel? That makes me feel bad. That's evil. This makes me feel good.

This is good. And feelings are one of the most unreliable measures of righteousness that there is, because the heart is deceitful above all things and what? Desperately wicked. Nobody can

figure it out.

Who can understand it? Jeremiah 17, 9. The heart is deceitful. The heart will lie to you. Your heart will tell you something is good and it's not.

Eve's heart told her that the fruit was desirable to make one wise. She bought the lie and her heart was in it. She said, well, this is going to be a good thing.

And hence the downfall of the human race. Therefore, Paul says, verse 26. And he says, we are striving for.

Notice he doesn't say competing for, but to obtain a perishable crown. These guys are temperate. We are temperate to obtain an imperishable crown, to obtain, not to outdo everyone else for, but we ourselves.

We're almost racing ourselves here. And we are temperate to obtain the crown. Now, wouldn't it be great if you knew exactly how to obtain one of the greatest rewards that the Lord can confer at the judgment seat of Christ? You've got it right here.

What do you do to obtain an imperishable crown? It's very simple. Control yourself. Control yourself in what context and for what purpose? Observe your fellow believers and don't do things that will cause them to stumble.

Don't do things that set them back. Be considerate. Be ye kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, forgave you.

Do unto others as you would have others do unto you. The Lord Jesus taught this beginning to end. And it's the same for us.

You know how you can win one of several crowns? You know, they talk about the five crowns of reward that are communicated in Scripture. This is the imperishable crown. This is the crown that does not fade away.

This is a crown you will wear throughout eternity, that in this life, you restrained yourself from doing things that might've pleased and might've gratified and that you might've enjoyed out of consideration for fellow believers. Run in such a way. Discipline yourself and be temperate with your eye on that prize.

It is legitimate to have a hope of earning this crown because it is a crown of obedience. It is a crown of love. It is a crown of being a blessing to others instead of a hindrance, of being a proponent of the cross instead of an enemy of the cross.

Paul said, I do this. Look at what I do. I don't make an issue out of the law for people who are under the law.

I don't make an issue out of tradition for those who are traditional. I don't make an issue out of

anything in order that I can gain them. You should do the same.

You want them to gain salvation. You want them to gain growth. And this love that is sacrificial to self and beneficial toward others is a function of self-control.

Temperance. That's the key. Self-control.

Temperance. I might feel like doing a thing. I might feel like pushing to winning an argument and demonstrating that somebody is all wet.

But is that the way to gain them? Probably not. And Paul comes back to himself. He started with himself.

I become all things to all men. And he ends with himself. I discipline my body.

I bring it into subjection. Lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. I practice what I preach.

This is why the qualification for a teaching elder is that he be a good example. You can't preach things that you haven't figured out yourself. And as you preach and you learn things and you realize that you're not meeting the standard, it's time to strive to meet that standard.

And this happens to all of us, whether we learn it from listening or whether we learn it from studying. It's a fresh message from the Lord. Do better.

Bring yourself into subjection. Do what Paul does. I don't want to be ineffective.

I don't want to box as a teacher or as a helper or as one who prays or as one who evangelizes and not connect. I don't want to do what I'm supposed to do and have no impact. He says, I don't box like somebody who's shadow boxing.

You're just beating the air. You need resistance. You need to push.

And you're going to miss from time to time. But you come back and you keep trying. I do not run uncertainly.

I pick a destination. I pick a route. If I'm going to go out here and run the section, I decide, am I going to run a half section? Am I going to run a quarter section? Or I'm going to run all the way around and do four miles.

It's great. You can do one mile. You can go, sections are great because they're exactly a mile on a side.

You can pick your distance. But you don't run uncertainly and say, well, let me see how I feel after I get so far. And if I feel good, your feelings can fool you and you can hurt yourself because you're on endorphins and you don't realize you're tearing yourself up.

You don't run uncertainly. You have a plan. You have a purpose.

You think it through. And then you discipline yourself. I don't want to tear my muscles.

So I'm going to start with low weight, even though it's embarrassing. I go to the gym. Somebody sees I'm only using 15 pounds.

Oh, that's terrible. I don't want to feel bad about myself. So I'm going to do 30 pounds.

Well, now I'm sore for a week and I can't work out. Discipline. I discipline my body.

I bring it into subjection. And notice I discipline my body. This is what is visible to others.

This is what is a testimony to others. What they see is not my soul. What they see is my activity, my body.

I discipline. I bring it into subjection so that when I have preached, and we're not all preachers, but when I have exercised the function of my gift, I am not found to have fallen short myself. Well, that concludes chapter nine.

There's plenty of application that I think we can all see for ourselves in it. The final fruit of the spirit is temperance, self-control. It is the key to winning this crown.

It is the key to being effective in the function of whatever your spiritual gift is. And without it, you beat the air. And you're running with an aimless destination.

You may be running, you may be expending a lot of energy, but it's not effective. You can box till you're blue in the face, but if you're boxing the air, it's not effective. Why waste the time? We want to run so as to achieve the imperishable crown.

Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the powerful ways that it shines light on our hearts.

It shines light on our path. It shines in us and through us to others when we are faithful, when we are obedient, and when we conform ourselves to the image of your son, the Lord Jesus. We pray that these things will motivate us, encourage us.

May God the Holy Spirit illuminate our thinking so that we can see how we can improve and do better in these areas and fulfill the calling and fulfill the function for which you have placed us in the body of Christ and placed us on this earth. We pray it all in Jesus' name. Amen.