LIFE BIBLE MINISTRY

1 Corinthians 9 :24 - 10:22

Lest I myself should be disqualified

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SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Hi everybody, and welcome back to our ongoing study of 1 Corinthians. We're going to be finishing out the last few verses of chapter 9, and then we're going to move into chapter 10. We won't cover the entire thing, but we'll go down through verse 22 of chapter 10. In the larger portion of chapter 9, which we covered last time, the apostle Paul was discussing the whole issue of how he made adjustments to different people with different cultural backgrounds, with different levels of maturity, and so forth, in order that he might win them. He said to the Jews, I speak from that perspective.

If someone is weak in their faith, I'm going to speak as someone who thinks like them. When I'm dealing with someone who doesn't know or hasn't been affected by the law of God, I'm going to talk to them from their perspective. When I speak to someone who knows and understands the law, I'm going to speak to them from their perspective. And of course, Paul wrapped it all up by saying, I do all this so that I might win them to Christ. Now in the last few verses of chapter 9, the apostle Paul shifts gears just a little bit as he begins to discuss the whole issue of his life and the example that he wants to convey to the Corinthians of a life that is lived with purpose, with intention.

And he says in these last verses of chapter 9, this is how I live. I want you to read it along with me. In chapter 9, beginning at verse 24 through the end of that chapter, it says, Do you not know that in a race all the runners run? They all take off, but only one receives the prize. So run that you may obtain it, meaning the prize.

He says every athlete exercises self-control in all things, right? He goes into strict training so that he might win the race. He says they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. And then he begins to speak now about his own life and ministry and devotion, saying, So I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air, but I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. We need to talk about these verses, and the reason we need to

discuss them a bit is because they become a springboard for what Paul is going to say as he moves on to what for us is chapter 10, or at least a good portion of chapter 10.

You'll notice that Paul begins to use this whole metaphor of the athlete. And you know, this was something that the Corinthians were well aware of. The Olympics weren't held in Corinth, but there was other games that were very popular in Corinth, and the people were certainly aware of how those games played out and how the winners won their prize. And the prize, by the way, was a leafy crown that they would put on their head, something quite different from the gold, silver, and bronze medals of the Olympics today. But either way, Paul says they, the athletes, go into strict training.

They have a regimen of how they're going to eat and how they're going to sleep and how they're going to train in order that they can prepare themselves to win when the events actually take place. And then he brings it to himself, saying, I've adopted this same procedure in my life with Jesus. I don't run like someone who's running in circles, you know. I know where the goal is. I know where the end point of the race is, and I'm running toward that end point.

He says, as a boxer, I'm not just beating the air, wasting my time. There are very intentional actions, he's saying, that I take to prepare myself for the kind of devotion that this ministry requires. And then what he says in verse 27 is so important that we understand. Let's read it again. He says, but I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others, I myself should be disqualified.

You know, sadly, I think all of us know of some preacher, teacher, who was well-known, who had a gift and an anointing from the Lord, who preached powerfully, perhaps even brought many to a saving knowledge of the cross, and yet who, because of some moral failure on their part, was disqualified from continuing on in the race. And they had to get out of the race and kind of shrink away. It's a very sad sort of a situation, because Paul is making it very clear that the race itself is not the goal. The goal is the finish line, the end. And so really, Paul is talking about finishing well.

And so that is what motivates him or inspires him to go on and say what he's going to say as we get on into chapter 10. And he has a lot more to say about finishing well, and he's going to make some statements, I'm going to tell you ahead of time, that might make some of us a little uncomfortable. Because he's going to talk about those who didn't finish well and who were disqualified. And he's going to use some examples from the nation of Israel, which of course are given us as examples, and he will make that statement for us that helps us to understand that that's why we have the Old Testament, as an example. And he is going to remind us of those examples as statements of warning.

So before we get into chapter 10, let's take a moment, let's pray, and we'll get into it. Father God, we thank you for the opportunity here today to dig into your Word. And Lord, when we look at warnings in the Scriptures, they're never really comfortable to read about. But I pray, my Father, that you would help us to see this in the spirit in which it was given and that we would hear your voice and that you would speak to us and encourage us from this Word to stay strong, to stay in the race, to press on toward the goal. We thank you, Father.

We ask your guidance. In the name of Jesus, our Savior, amen. All right, as we get into chapter 10 now, Paul is going to develop this whole idea of running the race and the warning about getting sidetracked. He says, For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea. Now when he says, our fathers, he's really talking about the Jewish fathers.

And even though he's speaking to Gentiles, he unknows and understands that the Gentiles have been grafted into the vine. The vine, of course, is Jesus, and now we share a common ancestry, spiritually speaking, with the nation of Israel. And so he's free to say, our fathers. He says, I don't want you to be unaware of the fact that, you know, our fathers were all under the cloud, and he's speaking of the cloud that guided them on their way through the wilderness when they left their slavery in Egypt. He says, and they all passed through the sea, and they were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

There he's making a connection between the passing of the nation of Israel through the Red Sea with the idea of immersion and water baptism in the Christian sense. And he says, and they all ate the same spiritual food. all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. That's the spiritual drink. It was actually just water, but he calls it the spiritual drink because it was supernaturally provided.

Same thing with the spiritual food. It was manna, but it was supernaturally provided for the people of Israel, and therefore he says all of these people participated in these things. They came together in such a way as to share a common experience. But here's the question. Did they have a common devotion to the Lord, or did they see and experience all of these wonderful things and then fall away?

That's what he's going to go on to talk about. In fact, he begins verse 5 by saying, nevertheless, with most of them, God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness, meaning essentially that they had to live out their lives in the wilderness, and we know that the adults all had to die off before the people of Israel could then make their way into the land that God had promised them. And then Paul says this in verse 6, and by the way, verse 6 is a proof text, if you will, for why we study the Old Testament. He

says, now these things took place as examples for us, meaning the body of Christ. So if you ever run into someone who says, I really don't get the point of studying the Old Testament.

It doesn't really apply. Well, it does apply as an example to the body of Christ. And he tells us here, the example is that we might not desire evil as they did. Now verse 7, do not be idolaters as some of them were. As it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and 23,000 fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. You know, he's citing the various examples that we have when we read about those stories in the Old Testament, and how the people fell away from faith and devotion to the Lord and began to run after the things of the world, and how many of them paid for those actions with their lives. He said these are examples. In fact, he repeats that now in verse 11.

Look with me there. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed. In other words, take heed to these examples, lest he fall. So you can see what the Apostle Paul is doing here, and this is the part that might be a little uncomfortable for some.

These are examples that are given to us as warnings. Where is your devotion? Are you toying with your salvation? You know, it's kind of interesting. There are Christians who come to Christ, obviously, put their faith in what he did on the cross, and then begin to live their lives apart from the Word of God.

And it's a way of really kind of taking risks that are completely unnecessary. They're doing the kinds of things that Paul is warning us about here. And you'll notice that he's not getting into details about the consequences of these warnings, or rather the end result of these things in a spiritual sense. I get questions all the time from people and say, what if? And everybody has these what-if scenarios.

What if somebody comes to Christ, and they accept him, and they're genuine in their faith, but they never live a Christian life? They live a life of immorality. What about that person? I don't know the answer to those questions. And I'm not going to step into the role of the judge.

That's not my job. And yet people continue to come up with these what-if scenarios. Paul is giving a scenario here that might produce a lot of what-if questions in your mind and in your heart. But don't think about that. That's God's position.

All he's doing is warning you. That's all he's doing. He's not saying, and if you continue on, well, then here's what's going to happen. He's not giving you that information. And so just deal with it.

He's just giving you a warning about staying in the race, and not getting sidetracked, not stumbling, not running off in a different direction than the Lord would have you. And we have to be satisfied with these warnings that go as far as they go, and not get into a whole lot of theological debates about the what-if scenarios. We just need to say, hey, God has given me a warning. And the warning is, be purposeful. Be intentional about my walk with the Lord.

And don't get involved in a lot of worldliness, because, you know, there's a lot of temptations. Boy, I tell you, and the longer you walk with the Lord, the more you're going to have to deal with those temptations. We will deal with temptations to get off course until we go home to be with the Lord, or until the Lord returns for us all in the rapture. Those temptations are not going to—they're not going to stop. The world is not going to turn itself off and stop drawing you and luring you into some sort of sinful pattern.

We're going to deal with these things in an ongoing way. So I don't know if that makes you feel discouraged when I say that, but it's true. So what has God done to make sure that we can stand and stay in the race? Well, that's really where we pick up the text as Paul continues in this vein. He says, listen, temptations are going to come.

They're going to come, but I want to remind you of something. Verse 13, no temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. In other words, every temptation that you will experience in this life is one that we've all experienced at one time or another. There is no temptation that is perfectly unique, okay? That's the first point that he's making.

Here's the second point. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability. But with the temptation, he will also provide the way of escape that you may be able to endure it. This is a single verse in the Bible that provides for you and me one of the most comforting and at the same time challenging promises in the Bible. The comforting part is that God knows all our temptations, and he has promised that with and through his Spirit, no temptation will arrive in your life that he cannot help you deal with.

Paul very clearly tells us here that he will provide a way of escape. You'll notice that Paul doesn't specify what that way of escape is, because it's going to be different for maybe every person or every

situation. You know, temptations are not all that unique, but the ways of escape very well could be. I get notes from people all the time who read this verse, and they'll say, what is it? What is the way of escape?

I want to know. Tell me what it is, because I want to recognize it when it comes. Well, I write them back, and I say, it is whatever the Lord gives you. It is whatever the Lord provides, and it could be a myriad of things. But he has promised that he will.

provide a way of escape. Why? So that you can stand up under the temptation. The words here in the ESV is that you can endure that temptation and not fall to it, okay? So this is a wonderful promise, but it is also a bit of a troubling statement, because by God telling you and me that he will faithfully provide a way of escape, we're left without an excuse when we do fall to those temptations.

People ask me sometimes, Pastor Paul, why did this happen to me? Why did I fall to this temptation? Well, it was because you chose not to take the way of escape that God provided, and you decided to indulge the flesh instead. And that's not a fun thing for people to hear. In fact, I've had people flat-out tell me they don't like that answer, and some of them even think that I'm wrong.

But if I'm wrong, then this promise isn't true. The promise is God will provide a way of escape. So if I fall to a temptation, then I obviously didn't take whatever way of escape he offered, right? Now, before we move on, I need to clarify that this verse has been misunderstood, and there are people who quote it in a way that really goes against the whole emphasis of what Paul is saying. And I'm willing to bet that many of you have heard the statement that God will never give you more than you can bear, which, by the way, is not in the Bible.

God will give you more than you can bear, and we see that even in the Bible. When Paul starts off his second letter to the Corinthians, he tells them, I want you guys to know the trouble that we endured when we were in the province of Asia. And then he goes on to say it was far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Okay? So will God give you more than you can bear?

Yeah. It's not more than he can bear, and he'll give you the grace to stand up under it, but yeah, it's gonna definitely be more than you can handle, right? But that's not what this verse says. You'll notice this verse says God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can endure. A temptation is very different than a troubling or difficult situation.

Those are two different matters, okay? The temptation is the temptation to sin. The troubling situation is simply a very difficult thing to endure, painful, a trial, okay? We could even call it a trial by fire. That he will allow, at times, to go beyond your ability.

But as you lean into him, he will give you the grace, as Paul goes on to talk about in 2 Corinthians chapter 12. All right. So now that we understand what this verse is really saying, we can move on. Verse 14. Therefore, my beloved, and when he says therefore, that's when we need to always ask ourself the question, what are those statements?

Therefore. Well, this is a summary. This is where Paul is giving you the payoff. Therefore, in light of what I've been saying, my beloved, flee from idolatry. In other words, flee from all the things that we've been given examples about that the nation of Israel fell to and were disqualified.

Flee from those things. Run from those things. He says, I speak to as to sensible people. Judge for yourselves what I say. And now he's going to go on and talk about things that we participate in that we may not participate rightly in.

And again, this all relates back to our calling to run the race and to finish the race appropriately. What are some of the things that can trip us up in this race? He says in verse 16, the cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? Yeah. Now he's talking about the cup that we observe during Communion, the Last Supper.

He says, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? And of course, that's a rhetorical question, and the answer is obviously yes. He goes on to say, the bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Again, the answer is yes. Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

So we're all participating in the same observance. But now he goes back to use the example of Israel. Consider the people of Israel. Are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? What do I imply then?

That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, he says that's not what I'm getting at. I imply that what pagans sacrifice, they offer to demons, even though they're unwittingly doing so. He says, they're offering those things to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons.

You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? All of this is to bring us back to understand that just because we participate in the race, it doesn't mean that it is impossible to be disqualified in that race. And even though we are participating with the Lord in the race that we've been called to, to run that race and to finish that

race, that doesn't mean that we can't be disqualified by participating in other things that are of the world and that are of the prince of this world, who is Satan.

When he talks here about fleeing from idolatry, fleeing from the things that could disqualify you from the race, he's talking about the things that the enemy is going to try to drag you away to participate in, so as to disqualify you. So he says, while you're participating in the things of the Lord, don't participate in the things of the enemy. You can't do that, and that's why he says you can't partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Listen, idolatry, sexual immorality, those are some of the things that are served up on the table of the enemy. Bitterness, revenge, jealousy, these are things the enemy serves up on his table.

You and I are participating in the table of the Lord in this race that we're running. We remind ourselves of the table of the Lord every time we participate in communion, and we are reminded that this is a unique table. This is a set-apart table. It is a holy table, and if I, while I am sitting and eating at this table, get up and excuse myself, and I go over and sit at the table of the enemy, and I engage in backbiting, and gossip, and anger, and malice, and hatred, I am participating in now another table. And Paul asks the question at the end, are you trying to provoke the Lord to jealousy?

Are you stronger than he is? You can see here, can't you, that what we're seeing in this latter part of chapter 9 and these first 22 verses of chapter 10, these are warnings. These are warnings about not getting off course, staying the course, as it were. There's a verse that I want to read to you from one other letter of the Apostle Paul when he wrote to the Philippians. In chapter 3, he said this, not that I have already obtained this, or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

And then listen to this. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. And that's a Paul's way of saying I haven't arrived there yet at the goal. But one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize. And what is that prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus?

That's it. That's the essence of what Paul is saying here in this section of 1 Corinthians. I pray that we would all press on for the upward prize. It's not just the race you see, even though the race is a marathon, it's not a sprint. It's not really the race itself that is our goal.

The goal is the finish line. Because as Paul said in this study, you know, all of the runners start off when the gun goes off, they all start running, but not all of them get to the goal. And certainly not all of

them get there first. So he says, when you run, run to get the prize, run to win the race. Don't get sidetracked.

Don't let the enemy draw you off course. Stay on course. That's the challenging part, isn't it? We're going to stop there for this study. Let's pray.

Father, very simple prayer. Keep us on course. Keep us with our eyes on the prize, the goal, the finish line, and give us the grace and the courage and the strength to stay on course. We thank you. We praise you.

We worship you. And all these things we pray in the authority granted us through the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.