

Running the Race **1 Corinthians 9:19-27**

Introduction:

1. Today there is a big race going on in Daytona – the Daytona 500. A lot of people are watching this race and can't wait to see the outcome.
2. Let me shock you – there is an even bigger race going on today. It is not a race that involves cars, but a race that involves believers. Paul spoke of it right here in our text.
3. Read verses 24-27. If we belong to Christ, we are in a race, and there is no doubt who we are racing against. Satan is our foe. That is who we are racing against.
4. What is Satan's goal? Satan wants to diminish and nullify our impact upon other people who need Christ as their Savior. He does not want us influencing other people for Christ. He wants to take us out and put us on the sideline in this race.
5. When we stand before the Lord one day, Satan doesn't want us to be able to rejoice in others that we have impacted and brought with us to heaven. He wants us to stand there empty-handed, with no other souls that we have impacted.
6. When Christ died on the cross and rose again, Satan was openly disgraced and humiliated, so now He desires to disgrace us and beat us in this race. He wants to make us a nonfactor. But every believer can win the race.
7. How can we impact other people for Christ and thereby win this race?

First, by maintaining a servant's heart - vs. 19-23

1. In verses 19-23, what is Paul teaching? He was willing to make himself a servant to others that he might have opportunity to win them to Christ.
 - *"Unto the Jews I became as a Jew"* – Even though Paul understood he was free from the Jewish law, Paul would gladly submit to the dietary restrictions of the law, so as not to offend them.
 - *"To them that are without law, as without law"* – Paul was a Jew and there were most likely meats, such as pork, that Paul did not personally care for, but when he was with a group of Gentiles, he would eat what they ate so as not to offend them.
 - *"To the weak became I as weak"* – In context, this is speaking of people with a weak conscience. Paul would not do anything to offend or defile their conscience.
2. Paul made himself a servant of all. Why would Paul lay aside his personal rights and take on such a servant's heart? The answer is in verses 19 and 23. Paul did it for the gospel's sake. He wanted to impact others with the gospel of Christ and win the race.
3. Paul would not compromise God's Word or God's commands in order to win somebody to Christ, but he would sacrifice his own rights and privileges (and preferences) for others. This should be our attitude. Do you possess a servant's heart?
4. As we serve others, we should do it as unto the Lord for the advancement of the gospel of Christ. **Ephesians 6:5-8**

Second, by looking to the crown – vs. 24-25

1. The Greeks had games they played similar to our Olympics. Paul is using this as an illustration to believers. Those athletes would have to discipline themselves, keep a set diet, lay aside some of the things they enjoyed and make sacrifices.

2. Why? In order to win a crown – a crown of olive leaves. Of course, these crowns would eventually deteriorate and fade away. Notice Paul’s words in vs. 24-25.
 - Illustration – my old trophies in attic (dust, nicks, heads missing, etc.)
3. We as Christians have the opportunity to win something far better – an **incorruptible** crown. In context, the prize or crown in heaven will be people (incorruptible souls) that we have impacted for Christ and led to Jesus Christ.

Cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20

 - Will we receive a literal crown of some sort from the hands of our Savior? It is very possible (**2 Timothy 4:8**). We should all want that crown. Why? Because of what it represents. It represents spiritual growth, impact for Christ, and faithfulness to Him.
 - The incorruptible crown says, “Job well done – you didn’t just live your life there on earth for yourself, but you served others and served Christ, and impacted others.”
4. When Paul talks about running to win the race, he isn’t talking about winning salvation and earning a spot in heaven. You can’t win salvation or earn heaven – it is a free gift that comes through Jesus Christ.
5. You aren’t even **in** this race until you trust Christ and become one of God’s children. At that point, you enter this race against Satan for the souls of people.
6. Some people are saved, but will stand in heaven before Christ empty-handed, having brought nobody else with them to heaven. They lived for themselves and did nothing to serve others and impact others for Christ.
7. What are you doing to serve others and impact others for Christ? Life is not about just acquiring all the possessions you can and then dying and leaving them all behind. It is about living your life unto Him with eternity in view.

Third, by glorifying God in your body – vs. 26-27

1. Could a runner training for the Olympics make his training diet consist of fried chicken, Big Macs, cupcakes, and lots of soda? Sure he could, but he chooses not to. Why? Because he’s in a race! There are choices that you make in life, based on the race you’re in.
2. In light of the race Paul was in, he said in verse 27, *“I keep under my body...”*
 - “Keep under” simply means “to subdue one’s passions.”
3. Paul willingly gave up rights that he **could** have claimed. He willingly deprived himself of things he legitimately **could** have done. They took a backseat. Why? So that he could impact others for Christ.
 - Paul is saying, “My fleshly desires aren’t the issue. They don’t call the shots.”
4. Paul didn’t want to become a castaway in the race. This simply means that Paul did not want to become worthless and a nonfactor in this race for lost souls.
 - Illustration: Cars in Daytona 500 that wreck or have engine trouble.
5. Paul would bring into subjection fleshly desires of his own so that he could better impact others for Christ. He didn’t want to run the race in vain. He wanted to be fruitful and an impact player on God’s team!
6. Paul desired to glorify God in his body. If the message of Christ was rejected by others, he didn’t want it to be because of inappropriate or selfish actions on his part.

7. The key to impacting others for Christ is when our words are backed up by our daily actions. People hear of Christ from our lips, but they see Christ in our actions.

In Conclusion:

1. Two questions:
 - Are you in this spiritual race? Have you trusted Christ as your Savior?
 - How are you doing in this race? Are you impacting lives for Christ?
2. Did you know there are some things you can't do in heaven? You can't lead anybody to Christ in heaven, you can't impact a person for Christ in heaven, and you can't give to missions or pray for a lost soul in heaven.
3. Once we die and go to heaven, our race is over. There is no more we can do. We must keep pressing forward, bringing people to Jesus because those precious souls will be our eternal, incorruptible crown that we will enjoy for all eternity.
4. Let's run the race with urgency!