

Winning the Race for Lost Souls – Part 2
1 Corinthians 9:14-27

Third, it takes a zealous heart. vs. 24-27

1. Paul doesn't talk about crawling, walking, or jogging in a race. He said, "*So run.*"
 - Why? Because we are in a race! You **run** in a race.
 - I love to watch the different countries run the 4-40 yard relay race in the Olympics. Those guys are giving it everything they have. They have trained and prepared a long time. They are running like it is serious business.
2. Running speaks of **urgency**. We can't afford to run this race lethargically. You can rest assured, Satan sure isn't running half-heartedly.
 - He is active and running full steam ahead with passion and zeal.
 - He is seeking to destroy Bible teaching churches, discourage missionaries, entice believers to fall in love with the world, turn away lost people from the gospel, etc.
 - Satan has a well organized army of fallen angels and they are divided into ranks of position and authority. **Ephesians 6:11-12**
3. Every moment thousands are dying and entering eternity, thousands upon thousands into a devil's hell, where **2 Thessalonians 1:9** says they will be "*...punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.*" There is a sense of urgency. vs. 24
 - What are you zealous about? What turns your crank? Making money, football, fishing, your job, etc? Are you zealous about the cause of Christ? Does it stir your heart to see people hear the gospel? Do you long to have the opportunity to share Christ with others?
 - Are you passionate about missions and helping missionaries get to the field?
 - If not, why not? Paul said we are in a race. The prize is precious souls. Paul said, "*So run, that ye may obtain.*" **Illustration: John 20:1-4**
4. Paul wasn't just winging it or taking a casual approach to ministry. Just as an athlete trains and prepares with a definite plan and purpose, Paul treated the cause of Christ with the same serious passion. vs. 25-26
 - Paul said that "*...they do it to obtain a corruptible crown.*" - a crown that will decay and fade away over time (**Illustration:** my sports trophies from childhood, in the attic, in a box, with dust all over them, nicks on them, heads missing, etc.).
 - What is that incorruptible crown in verse 25 that Paul was trying to obtain? It was the incorruptible souls of **people** that he reached with the gospel of Christ. **1 Thessalonians 2:19-20; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:52**
5. Paul said that "*...every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.*"
 - This word "temperate" carries the idea of restraint. You say "no" to things you **could** have, in light of the contest or competition you are in. Anything that would hinder you in the race and slow you down, you refuse. **Hebrews 12:1**
 - There are certain things that may not be a sin, but they are weights that keep you from being an effective witness for Christ.
 - Could a runner in the Olympics make his training diet consist of McDonalds, Twinkies, and soda? Sure he could, but he chooses not to. Why? Because he's in a race!

6. In light of this race, Paul says that he controlled his own selfish desires. He said "...I keep under my body." vs. 27
 - "Keep under" simply means "to subdue one's passions." Paul may have had legitimate rights, but he chose to bring them into submission. Why? He desired for the preaching of the gospel to be received and to change lives.
 - Paul willingly gave up rights that he could have claimed. He willingly deprived himself of things he legitimately could have done.
 - He did this so his preaching would be effectual and powerful. He didn't want his personal life or actions to hinder the gospel.
 - Paul said he brought his body into subjection. In other words, Paul is saying, "My fleshly desires aren't the issue. They don't call the shots. **I** may desire to throw my weight around and push **my** rights, but I'm not going to."
 - Why did Paul take such a humble approach to ministry? After all, he was an apostle, **the** apostle of the Gentiles. It was because he desired for his preaching of the gospel to be effectual and powerful and reach people.
7. Many interpret Paul's reference to becoming a castaway as a reference to his relationship to God. This doesn't fit the context.
 - The context has to do with his servanthood to others so that he could reach them with the gospel.
 - The word "castaway" simply means "rejected." Paul isn't referring to being rejected by God. Paul knew he was secure and accepted in Christ. I think Paul is referring to being rejected by those he was seeking to reach and minister the gospel to. Doesn't that fit the context?
 - Paul willingly gave up **his** rights so that he could gain an audience with people, preach to them the gospel, and be used of God, rather than being rejected by the Jews, Gentiles, those weak in conscience, etc. Paul wanted to be **valuable** in God's service, not worthless. He didn't want to be a castaway.
 - One of Paul's constant concerns was that he would labor or run in vain. How would this happen? By people him and his message. **Galatians 2:2, 4:11; Philippians 2:16; 1 Thessalonians 2:1, 3:5** This is the same idea in **1 Corinthians 9:24-27**
 - He **was**, in fact, many times rejected, but he did not want it to be because of his inappropriate or selfish actions. He didn't want it to be because he pushed his rights and offended people. May be people be offended by our **position** (stand for truth), not our **disposition**.

In Conclusion:

1. We are in a race for lost souls. What is the finish line? The coming of Jesus Christ at the rapture.
2. You can't lead anyone to Christ in heaven or give to missions or pray for a lost soul. This is why Paul said in Philippians 3:14, "***I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.***"
3. We must keep pressing forward in this race, bringing people to Jesus, because those precious souls will be our eternal, incorruptible crown that we will enjoy for all eternity.

4. At the end of our life, hopefully by God's grace we can say with Paul, *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."* **2 Timothy 4:7**