

The Running Of The Race

"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" (1 Corinthians 9:24).

In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul compares our walk of life as a Christian to one running a race. There are some great lessons to be learned from this idea and from this passage. We will now examine vs. 24-27 and discover the points Paul is trying to make.

In vs. 24, Paul uses the idea of one running in a race. He first looks at it from a physical standpoint, and explains that while many run in the race, only one receives the prize. Then he goes on to say, *"Run in such a way that you may obtain it."* Is Paul now saying that we should run in a race in which there will only be one winner? Certainly not!

Vs. 25 says, *"And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown."* Here Paul is switching from physical to spiritual. We can see that he is now referring to another race: one much more important and also one that will have more than one winner. The phrase *"temperate in all things"* implies self-control. Paul's point in vs. 25 is that since those who run in a physical race exercise self-control to make sure that their bodies are in top condition, even so Christians must exercise self-control to make sure their souls are in top condition. This is even more essential for the Christian, since the spiritual race is much more important than any physical one.

Vs. 26 says, *"I therefore so run, as not uncertainly; so fight I, as not beating the air."* Paul implies here how certain he is of winning the race and receiving the prize. He is sure what he is aiming for and he has his heart fixed upon the goal. The phrase *"beating the air"* would imply a waste of effort, or something that he did in vain. Paul's point is that while running the race, he does not do anything that would be in vain. Every ounce of effort that he gives is necessary in order to win the race.

Finally, in vs. 27 he says, *"But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."* Paul here is explaining how he puts forth his efforts to win the race. Again he uses the idea of self-control, which if used continually would keep his mind and soul in top condition so that he could stay focused on his goal. Paul also shows the consequence of not using self-control. Paul was an apostle who was sent to preach the gospel. It was his life, in which he had put forth so much effort, being persecuted for the gospel's sake. But even

after all of this, if Paul were to let his guard down and lose his self-control he would be disqualified or lost. This shows us how important self-control is and how much we need it in the race that we are running.

The conclusion of this is that we are in a race in which all of those who are running have the chance to win. Sadly, so many will not win because of their lack of self-control. But if we use self-control and keep our lives free from sin, we can win the race and receive that prize that will surely be worth it all! In some of Paul's last words ever written, he restates again how sure he is of Heaven: *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing"* (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

Jonathan Glaesemann