

## **Run to Win the Prize (1 Corinthians 9:24-10:13)**

Expository Lessons from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

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### **I. Review from Prior Lessons and Introduction to the Topic**

- a. Thus far, Paul has addressed the following problems in his letter to the Corinthian church:
  - i. Division in the church;
  - ii. Church discipline to deal with sexual immorality in the church;
  - iii. Lawsuits among believers;
  - iv. Issues related to married and single life;
  - v. Eating meat sacrificed to idols; and
  - vi. Financial support for those working in the ministry.
- b. Paul next addresses one of the most important and practical questions any of us could possibly ask: "What will it take for me to be saved in the end?"
- c. The text we are about to cover touches on material that made an enormous impact on my life about 40 years ago.
  - i. Soon after I was baptized, over four decades ago, I took a class at church: *'A Survey of the Old Testament'*. We went through the historical part of the Old Testament, with assigned reading of 60 Old Testament chapters/week.
  - ii. After studying the **Five Books of Moses**, the teacher went to **1 Corinthians 10:1-13** and explained that the story of the exodus from Egypt and journey through the Wilderness for 40 years foreshadowed the Christian life.
    1. In addition to being a true story, the exodus journey story also provides us with a detailed 'scale model' of the Christian life. The important applications for us are woven into the stories in the **Five Books of Moses**, especially in **Exodus** and **Numbers**. Through those stories, we (Christians) are *shown what it will take for us to make it through this life* in such a way that *we will be saved in the end*.

- iii. It opened up my eyes to how important it is for Christians to study and understand the Old Testament. I found this to be so useful and so faith-building that I decided to devote a significant part of my life to learning the Old Testament so that I could teach it to Christians.
  1. That, in turn, opened up doors for me to teach the Bible to Christians in Albania, other countries in Eastern Europe, and to campus students in Boston.
  2. Several years later, when I started reading the early Christians, I discovered from reading Justin Martyr and others how they used the Old Testament prophecies as overwhelming evidence to convince both Jews and Gentiles to come to faith in Christ.
  3. A deeper understanding of the Old Testament, combined with insights gained from reading the early Christians, transformed my ability to get a lot more understanding from the New Testament. It also enhanced my ability to teach the New Testament.
- iv. But it all started with this passage, unlocking for me the importance of knowing the Old Testament.
  1. Last summer vacation, I came back with a desire to teach through **Numbers** (which we started in December 2022 and finished in 2023). I wanted to teach that book because it covers most of the 40 years in the Wilderness, which Paul explained correlates to the Christian life in this world (between the time we are baptized and the time we reach the ultimate goal of our faith: “the Promised Land”).
  2. In our first lesson on **Numbers** in that series, in order to explain why that book was so important, I started by reading the passage we will cover today: **1 Corinthians 9:24-10:13**.
  3. My hope is that this story will inspire others to *‘turn themselves in’ and make similar decisions*.
    - a. We need hundreds and thousands of good Bible teachers!

## II. Run As One Seeking to Win the Prize

- a. Read **1 Corinthians 9:24-27**.
  - i. Here, Paul uses two examples from athletic competition to make his point about the attitude it will take. He draws here from *running* and *boxing*.

- ii. Note that he has used examples elsewhere from other occupations, including farming, shepherding, building construction and military service.
- b. Why this topic matters to us.
- i. David Bercot (early Christian expert and teacher, author of *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*) mentioned to me recently that he was planning to work on a project with another friend of mine, Douglas Jacoby. This would be a teaching series featuring prominent teachers from various religious backgrounds teaching the historic faith position on eternal security. In other words, they would be showing that someone can be “saved” but later lose their salvation by falling into serious sin (without subsequently repenting).
    - 1. Many Protestants today teach ‘unconditional eternal security’, a theological position that when a person becomes “saved” they can never lose their salvation, *no matter what they do thereafter*.
    - 2. The problem that Douglas Jacoby was having in lining up speakers: practically none of the most prominent Protestant teachers or preachers hold to the historic position (that we can lose our salvation). Almost all of them believe in unconditional eternal security.
    - 3. However, in the passage we just read and in the one we are about to read, Paul clearly explains that he himself must be careful that he is not rejected by God on the Last Day. Furthermore, he is warning the Corinthian Christians that they will be destroyed if they are not vigilant in staying out of sin.
      - a. That is the entire point of what Paul is saying here!
      - b. This is consistent with what Jesus taught, including in His parables (consider the *Parable of the Soils* in **Luke 8:4-15**, the *Parable of the Unmerciful Servant* in **Matthew 18:23-35**, and the *Parable of the Vine and the Branches* in **John 15:1-8**).
      - c. This popular Protestant doctrine of unconditional eternal security is also refuted by Jude, as we discussed in a recent message on that letter, when he said:
        - i. “But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having *saved the people* out of the land of Egypt, *afterward destroyed those who did not believe.*” (**Jude 5**, NKJV)

- ii. **Question to Jude:** Can someone be “saved” initially, but later end up being destroyed through their own sin?

1. **Answer:** Yes.

- 4. The popular presentation of ‘the gospel’ today is that since Christ did it all for us, we don’t really need to do anything more than accept what He did on our behalf.
  - a. According to this perspective, once we accept that by faith, we are saved and cannot be disqualified from our salvation (since we did nothing to be qualified to receive that in the first place).
- c. Paul says we need to approach the Christian life like an athlete seeking to win the championship. He expresses that he himself must control his own fleshly desires so that he, even after preaching to others, will not be disqualified (rejected by God).
  - i. To some of us, those who were never into competitive sports, this may strike us as discouraging to hear.
    - 1. “Do I need to have the kind of intensity and discipline of an athlete seeking to win a prize?”
    - 2. Some, hearing this, may be tempted to give up!
    - 3. However, there are others who can relate to this personally, who will feel challenged and called higher.
  - ii. **Question:** How many among us can relate to either of these examples Paul is using? Do we have any former *boxers* or *competitive runners* who are listening to this lesson? How about former competitive athletes do we have *of any type*?
- d. I can relate to this personally as a former competitive runner.
  - i. In high school, I ran cross country for a school that is famous for cross country and track.
  - ii. About the Christian Brothers Academy program:
    - 1. I attended Catholic high school, all boys, located in Lincroft, N.J. We had to wear a dress shirt, dress pants and a tie every day.
    - 2. In general, I would say there was an “over the top” focus on sports and winning.

3. All freshmen start the year with a 1.3-mile run. The top finishing runners from that initial race are encouraged to join the school's cross-country team.
  - a. However, *all students* were welcome to join the cross-country team; no one was cut from the team.
4. Last year, the school won its 25<sup>th</sup> (of a total of 49 in state history) All-Group State Championship in cross-country. This is a school that only has about 600 students. Also the school won the N.J. state track championship last year.
5. The school has been undefeated for 50 years in cross-country dual meets.
  - a. The last time the varsity cross country team lost a dual meet (against runners from one other school) was on October 20, 1973. (Richard Nixon was president, and gasoline was \$0.39/gal.)
  - b. They broke the national record for longest winning streak about 20 years ago and (as of the time I am giving this message, in September 2023) have not lost since.
  - c. There was very a close call once, that almost broke the winning streak.
    - i. Once, against a rival team (that everyone considered to be faster than our team that year), the CBA runners managed to run an extraordinary race and ended up with a tie. (In cross-country, it is the first 5 finishers from each team who are counted in the score.)
    - ii. Under the very rare circumstances where there is a tie in the scoring of the first five runners, the winner of the race is determined by the place of each team's 6<sup>th</sup> fastest runner. The sixth-fastest runner on the CBA team managed to beat the sixth-fastest runner from the other team; therefore, the CBA team won by the narrowest possible margin, and the streak remained unbroken.
    - iii. As a colorful aside, one of the top finishers from the CBA team stepped in a hole near the end of the race and sprained his leg. He managed to

finish the race for his team, but was taken away in an ambulance right after crossing the finish line!

6. **Question:** Why this extraordinary, record-breaking winning streak from such a relatively small school?
  - a. Great coaching certainly is part of the reason.
  - b. There is a culture that emphasizes hard work, discipline, being willing to push through extreme pain. There are also very high expectations.
  - c. Every runner has the sense that he is part of something greater than himself. They feel a burden to run on behalf of all those who had gone before them: to do their part to carry a legacy forward
  
- iii. About my own experience as a competitive runner in high school.
  1. **Question:** Do you mean to tell us, Chuck, that you were a championship runner in high school?
    - a. **Answer:** No, I never said that!
    - b. Recall, no one was ever cut from the cross-country team.
    - c. I was so slow as a runner that my parents gave me a *turtle tie tack* as a gift while I was a runner for the school.
      - i. That story should provide some insight regarding both lack of speed as a runner, and the kind of 'nurturing, encouraging' family I grew up in!
  
- iv. Running to win, later in my life.
  1. Later in life, working at an engineering company with an office in Cambridge, Massachusetts, many of us would jog during lunch hour. The most competitive runner in the group invited all of us to train for a local 5k race, to be followed by a cookout.
    - a. I asked one of the younger co-workers and a fellow jogger, Mary Norman, if she planned to participate in the 5k race.

- b. When she said she did, I asked her if she had a personal goal in the race (such as finishing in X minutes, or beating her own personal best time).
- c. I was stunned when she calmly shared with me her personal goal: it was *to beat me!*
  - i. Of course, since I was a competitive person, you can probably guess what my goal for that race became from that moment.
  - ii. This challenge inspired me to train harder in the time before the race day.
- d. At the starting line of the 5k race, as the runners were gathered anticipating the start and the pain that would follow, my wife Alison (who is not competitive at all) said to me: "If it hurts, stop!"
  - i. Approaching the race, I had to *push that thought out of my mind!*
  - ii. At the end of the race, approaching the finish line, it was a 'worst-case scenario' for me. Mary Norman was just a few paces ahead of me!
  - iii. I gave it everything I had, but just missed beating her.
  - iv. The competitive runner who invited all of us to the race finished early and watched me crossing the finish line. Later, he told me he thought I had briefly '*blacked out*' at the finish line from over-exerting myself!
- e. Lessons for us related to running.
  - i. Re-read **1 Corinthians 9:24-27**.
  - ii. We need to run our spiritual race with the intensity of someone who is training and running to win the prize.
  - iii. The prizes that athletes seek are fading (leaves in the crown of the Boston Marathon, brief fame, trophies that rust or collect dust, that will be discarded or burned someday).
    - 1. Those who avoid athletics because they see it as '*not worth the effort*' do have a point.

2. The rewards from winning athletic competitions *are temporary and will perish*.
  3. However, the crown we will gain on the Last Day is worth the effort and discipline. It will last forever and never perish.
- iv. Paul is acting as the player-coach here. He is running the race himself, yet *admonishes us to run as well*.
1. We need coaches who will inspire us and call us higher as we train.
- v. We need to “discipline our bodies” and “bring them into subjection” as an integral part of our training.
1. Prayer and study of Scripture.
  2. Fasting.
  3. Self-control in the face of sexual temptation and fits of rage.
  4. Control of the tongue.
  5. Willingness to endure suffering for righteousness’ sake, even when being treated unjustly, following the example of Jesus.
    - a. Furthermore, to do this *without complaining!*
  6. Consider what Paul preached to Felix:
    - a. “Now as he reasoned about *righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, ‘Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.’*” (**Acts 24:25**, NKJV)
- vi. Do not *run aimlessly*. Don’t box as *someone beating the air*.
1. Focus on the goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls.
  2. Everyone runs, but most people run about aimlessly (straying, in circles, backwards, off-course). Run with your eyes on the goal, and do not get distracted.
  3. Example of a boxer in the arena. If he swings wildly and merely hits the air (instead of connecting with his opponent), he will accomplish nothing, exhausting himself in the process. He will end up getting knocked out by his opponent.
    - a. We are in the arena with an enemy who is trying to destroy us.



- b. We need to recognize that we have an enemy in the ring, Satan. May we follow the example of Jesus, who struck back powerfully with the word of God when He was tempted and tested by Satan. (**Matthew 4, Luke 4**)
- vii. Let us continue the legacy of the heroes of faith who have gone before us.
  - 1. This is our time in the arena. It is our race. Others, heroes of faith, have gone before. Keep that in mind. We are continuing a wonderful legacy and are part of something much greater: the kingdom of God.
  - 2. “Therefore we also, *since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses*, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (**Hebrews 12:1-2**, NKJV)

### III. The Exodus Map: an Allegorical Model of the Christian Life

- a. Read **1 Corinthians 10:1-13**.
- b. **A Few Questions:**
  - i. How many were in the first generation (those who were “baptized” into Moses and crossed the Red Sea out of Egypt)?
    - 1. **Answer:** There were about 600,000 men who departed Egypt and crossed the Red Sea, besides the women and children. (**Exodus 12:37**)
  - ii. How many of those made it to the Promised Land?
    - 1. **Answer:** Only two: Joshua and Caleb. Even Moses and Aaron did not make it! (**Numbers 26:65**)
  - iii. Why didn’t the others make it to the end?
    - 1. Because they sinned in the Wilderness. (**1 Corinthians 10:5**)
    - 2. To provide an example for us (Christians) and to teach us an extremely important and sobering lesson! (**1 Corinthians 10:11**)
      - a. Just because we have been baptized, eat the spiritual food and drink the spiritual drink (Lord’s Supper, Word

of God), and *drink from Christ, does not mean we will automatically make it to our destination.*

- iv. Should I be shocked if I see other Christians, including prominent leaders, falling into serious sin?
  - 1. **Answer:** No, we should not be surprised or discouraged when we see things like this happen.
  - 2. This was all revealed to us before, in the story of the exodus journey. Many who were “baptized”, who “ate the spiritual food and drank the spiritual drink”, and who even “drank from the rock...Christ” did not make it to the end. They sinned and ended up being destroyed, a fate that applied even to prominent leaders such as Moses and Aaron.
- v. Why shouldn't I just give up now, since I am *surely not* one of the top 0.00033% of Christians?
  - 1. **Answer:** Paul explains that *any of us can make it to the end successfully*. It is not impossible!
  - 2. “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” (**1 Corinthians 10:13**, NKJV)
  - 3. God is faithful. He *ALWAYS* keeps His promises.
    - a. It is part of His very nature. Never forget that!
  - 4. He wants all men to be saved. He is on our side.
    - a. “...God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (**1 Timothy 2:2-4**, NKJV)
  - 5. He will not let any Christian be tempted beyond their ability.
    - a. If we sin, it is because we did not avail ourselves of the protection available to us.
    - b. We need to be devoted to prayer, confessing our sins, and meditating daily on the Word of God.
    - c. Don't be isolated. We all need the encouragement and sharpening from our brothers and sisters.

- i. We are not designed to make this journey alone!
- c. The typology revealed in the story of the exodus journey.
  - i. The exodus journey from Egypt to the Promised Land is a true story. At the same time, it provides us with a *type* (allegorical scale model, revealed in advance) of *the Christian life*.
    - 1. “Now all these things happened to them as examples....” (In Greek, literally: ‘*as types*’.) (**1 Corinthians 10:11**, NKJV)
    - 2. Type = pattern, foreshadowing.
      - a. Think of an old-fashioned typewriter, or even of moveable type on a printing press from long ago. The type provides a pattern; when it strikes the inked ribbon or pad, it imparts its image (the antitype) on the paper.
      - b. Examples of ‘types’ we find in Scripture include the Passover Lamb (**1 Corinthians 5:7**), Moses/Jesus parallels (**Deuteronomy 18:15-19, Acts 3:22**), Flood of Noah/Baptism (**1 Peter 3:20-21**), and Tabernacle/New Covenant (**Hebrews 8-9**).
    - 3. In my civil engineering work, we often make scale models (2-D or 3-D, on paper or in a software image) of a structure, before we construct the real thing out of concrete.
  - ii. Elements Paul mentions
    - 1. Red Sea crossing = baptism
    - 2. Cloud and sea = water and Spirit.
      - a. The cloud = the Holy Spirit. It appears after the Passover Lamb is slain (**Exodus 12-13**), leads the people to and through the water, and then leads them in the Wilderness all the way to the Promised Land (**Numbers 9**).
    - 3. Wilderness wandering period (40 years of testing) = the Christian life
      - a. Also, consider Jesus being led into the Wilderness immediately after His baptism, for 40 days of tempting/testing by Satan.

4. Spiritual food and drink that sustained the people = the Lord's supper, which sustains Christians spiritually on our journey.
5. Rock from which they drank = Christ
  - a. "On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" (**John 7:37-38**, NKJV)
  - b. Sometimes I have heard Calvinists (who claim that a person who is saved cannot thereafter lose their salvation through sinning) claim that those in the Wilderness who fell were not truly 'saved'. However, consider what the passage in **1 Corinthians 10** says about the Israelites. Not only were they baptized; it also says that they "drank from Christ" (who was represented by the rock).
    - i. Clearly the point was making to the Corinthians is that even if they are already in Christ, they can lose their salvation if they are not diligent and turn away to serious sin. That is the very point he is making from this analogy!
6. Promised Land = Heavenly reward we are seeking
7. Other elements of typology that were seen by early Christians (for example, Gregory of Nyssa in his *Life of Moses*) include:
  - a. Pharaoh = Satan, the oppressive ruler who won't let his captives go.
  - b. Egypt = life of slavery to sin in this world before we become Christians.
  - c. In baptism (passing through the water), *two things* happen:
    - i. God's people are delivered from their past slavery and
    - ii. The forces of evil (represented by Pharaoh's army) are destroyed by the water. (**Exodus 14-15**)

8. Paul in **1 Corinthians 5**: Now that the Passover Lamb has been slain (Jesus dying on the cross), we must eat bread without yeast (purging the old sins from our lives).
  - a. We find several allusions in the New Testament to the exodus journey story providing a foreshadowing of the Christian life. Consider the parallels alluded to by Paul, Jude, and the writer of **Hebrews 3-4**.
  - b. **Open Question**: Do these references suggest there was a widespread understanding among the apostles and in the early church that the **Exodus/Numbers** story foreshadowed the Christian life in detail?
- d. How they sinned: lessons for us (4 or 5 specific sins we must avoid).
  - i. Do not lust after evil things as they lusted. (**1 Corinthians 10:6**)
    1. I assume that here, Paul is referring to the account in **Numbers 11**, where the Israelites lusted after the kind of food they had enjoyed back in Egypt.
  - ii. Do not become idolaters. (**1 Corinthians 10:7**)
    1. Here, Paul quotes from the account of the people worshiping the golden calf at Mount Sinai, from **Exodus 32**.
  - iii. Do not commit sexual immorality. (**1 Corinthians 10:8**)
    1. Here, Paul is referring to the story of Moabite women seducing the Israelite men, from **Numbers 25:1-15**.
    2. 'Only' 24,000 died (23,000 in one day) because of the zeal of Phinehas in boldly confronting the sin. He drove a javelin through the man and woman caught in the act of sexual immorality, thereby stopping the plague of death.
      - a. The church needs more men who have the same zeal for righteousness and addressing sin that Phinehas demonstrated here!
    3. Let us consider, in light of this, the great dangers of sexual immorality, including the plague of internet pornography today.
    4. **Challenge**: *Do not go anywhere near* the temptations of sexual immorality! (**Proverbs 5:7-10**)

- a. Study and meditate on passages in Proverbs and elsewhere in Scripture on purity, including accounts of those who were victorious, such as Joseph (**Genesis 39**) and Phinehas (**Numbers 25**).
  - b. Be open and confess your sins to a trusted brother (for men) or sister (for women). (**James 5:16**)
- iv. Do not tempt Christ. (**1 Corinthians 10:9**)
  - 1. The Greek words translated “tempt” here (peirazo / πειράζω ; ekpeirazo / ἐκπειράζω) can also be translated “to test” or “to put to the test”. For example:
    - a. “nor let us *tempt Christ*, as some of them also *tempted*, and were destroyed by serpents;” (**1 Corinthians 10:9**, NKJV)
    - b. “We must not *put Christ to the test*, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents....” (**1 Corinthians 10:9**, ESV)
  - 2. God *puts us* to the test. We must not attempt to *put Him* to the test!
  - 3. The reference to *being destroyed by serpents* points to the account in **Numbers 21:4-9**.
  - 4. Another reference to “tempting/testing the Lord” in the Wilderness is in **Exodus 17:1-7**.
    - a. That apparently was referred to in **Deuteronomy 6:16** as a lesson-teaching incident to be remembered.
- v. Do not complain. (**1 Corinthians 10:10**)
  - 1. The Israelites complained about all kinds of things while they were in the Wilderness (including food, water, their leaders, and the plan to enter Canaan).
  - 2. A very challenging New Testament passage:
    - a. “Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world....” (**Philippians 2:14-15**, NKJV)

3. **Question:** Do you see complaining as a major sin that can disqualify you from our eternal inheritance?
    - a. What do you complain about?
      - i. Spouse, children
      - ii. Lack of money
      - iii. Challenging relationships
      - iv. Housing, cost of living, job, etc?
    - b. How do your hardships compare with those of Israelites in the Wilderness?
- e. **Take-Aways for Us**
- i. Don't assume you have your salvation 'in the bag'.
  - ii. Keep focused and stay vigilant, like a runner running to win the prize.
  - iii. Learn from the Old Testament examples and foreshadowings.
  - iv. Learn the lessons for us from the journey of the Israelites in the Wilderness, especially the stories found in **Exodus** and **Numbers**.
  - v. Avoid the five sins that Paul refers to here, like the plague. Root them out of your life, and stay far away from them.
  - vi. Remember that God is faithful. He always keeps His promises. And He has promised us here that He will not let us be tempted beyond our ability.
    1. With God's help, if we embrace Paul's attitude, every one of us can successfully make it to the end, on the Last Day!