

Studies in 1 Corinthians

Lesson XXV: *The Priority of a Godly Leader*

TEXT: 1 COR. 9:19-27 (NLT)

19 Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ. **20** When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law. **21** When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law,^[d] I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ.

22 When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. **23** I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings.

24 Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! **25** All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. **26** So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. **27** I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.

Footnotes: d. Greek *those without the law*

INTRODUCTION

Last week, we looked at the motive of a godly leader. In this lesson, we will learn about the priority of a godly leader. In the hectic pace of 21st century life, there are many priorities competing for our attention. Even the church can lose its focus on the primacy of the Great Commission, becoming entangled in other priorities. This passage of Scripture helps us to readjust our focus on the thing that matters most.

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. a. Why was Paul willing to become “a slave to all”? (vs. 19, 22)
 - b. What does this reveal about his true priority?
 - c. What was he willing to give up in his effort to reach out and win the lost to Christ? (vs. 20-22)
 - d. What are you willing to give...and give up...to see God’s Kingdom grow?
2. In what way is the training of an athlete and running a race analogous to living the Christian life? (vs. 24-27)
3. Verse 27 is a powerful statement about the value of spiritual discipline in the Christian life. Regarding the expression “I discipline my body” (KJV: “I buffet my body”) Biblical scholar Albert Barnes writes:

The word [...] means, properly, to strike under the eye, either with the fist or the cestus [a belt worn by ancient Greeks], so as to render the part livid, or, as we say, black and blue; or, as is vulgarly termed, to give any one a black eye. The word is derived, of course, from the athletic exercises of the Greeks. It then comes to mean, to treat any one with harshness, severity, or cruelty; and thence also so to treat any evil inclinations or dispositions; or to subject one's self to mortification or self-denial, or to a severe and rigid discipline, that all the corrupt passions might be removed. The word here means, that Paul made use of all possible means to subdue his corrupt and carnal inclinations; to show that he was not under the dominion of evil passions, but was wholly under the dominion of the gospel.

- a. Why was Paul so concerned about being disciplined?
- b. How can 21st century Christians discipline themselves similarly for the race of life?