

Modeling Christ 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

We all know that Context determines the meaning of a text and that “text without context is pretext.”

What you already know about 1 Corinthians is going to put these verses in their appropriate context and, as a result, add new, rich meaning to their application for us.

Throughout the book Paul has been asking the Corinthians to prefer one another.

- to rest in God’s wisdom and not human knowledge - 2
- to love Jesus more than personalities - 3
- to discipline those who live in sexual immorality - 5
- to settle grievances in the church and not in court - 6
- to happily live and let each other live married, single or widowed - 7
- to surrender their liberties when they are offensive to a brother/sister – 8
- 9 – He models this surrender/deference by his own apostleship
 - 1-5 – Marriage and eating
 - 6-15 – Financial support
 - 16-18 – Passion for the Gospel
 - 19-23 – Serving all

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. ²⁵ Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶ So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. ²⁷ But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

First: Christianity as a Sport 24-26

You will remember that the Isthmian games began in 582 BC in honor of the god Poseidon (since Corinth was a Mediterranean harbor town) were held in Corinth the year before and the year after the Olympics.

The games sponsored chariot racing, wrestling, pankration (MMA), boxing and even musical and poetic contests. A guy by the name of Kleitomachos the Theban won the pankration and boxing in both 216 and 212BC and then the pankration, wrestling and boxing in one day (unk which games)

- a) v 24 – Racing
- b) v 26b – Boxing

Paul often referenced the Olympic or Isthmian games.

Philippians 1:27-30 - *Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind **striving side by side** for the faith of the gospel,*

“striving side by side” = “playing on the same side together in an athletic context”

V 30 - *and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.*

Vs 29-30 - *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, ³⁰ engaged in the same **conflict** that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.*

“conflict” = agon = agony = any kind of athletics contest

Philippians 2:16-17 - *holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not **run** in vain or **labor** in vain.*

3:12-14 - *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 4:2-3 - *I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. ³ Yes, I ask you also, **true companion**, help these women, who have labored **side by side with me** in the gospel...*

2 Timothy 2:5 - *An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.*

2 Timothy 4:7-8 - *I have fought the good fight [**agon**], I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day...*

Romans 11:11-12 - *So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. ¹² Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!*

Galatians 5:7 - *You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?*

Which brings us back to the text –

24-25 - *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.* ²⁵ *Every athlete exercises self-control in all things.*

III – Isthmian athletes went into training ten months before the games. If the games happened two out of three years, it means they were in training for 20 out of 36 months.

V 27 *“I discipline my body...”*

- Paul isn’t just referring to his body – v 25 – *“self-control in all things”*
- *“discipline” = hoopopeeadzo = to beat black and blue* (From two words:
 - *“to hit under the eye”* and
 - *“to subdue”*

APP: Are we shamed by Paul’s seriousness?
What “self-control” do the Corinthians lack?

- They love human wisdom
- Carried away with personalities
- They won’t define sin (5)
- They have to win (6)
- They are sexually immoral (7)
- They won’t stop eating food offered to idols (8)

APP: Are we shamed by Paul’s seriousness?

v 26-27 – *“I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control.”*

Where do we lack “self-control?”

The “prize” of v 24 is available only to those who “run” with “self-control.”

Otherwise, you are

- running, “aimlessly” (26a), crossing into other lanes and being disqualified (27b) or
- like a boxer, wasting energy (26b) so that you can’t finish the round.

Second: What's at Stake? 27

Isthmian winners originally received a wreath of celery but then it was changed to pine leaves.

Paul has placed our race in a positive note – v 25 – *“They do it to receive a perishable wreath but we an imperishable.”*

- *“perishable” = phartos = corruptible*
- *“imperishable” = aphartos = immortal, uncorruptible*

But there is also a negative – v 27b – *“lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”*

“disqualified” = adokeemos = not approved, worthless, rejected (like fake coins)

We know this did not happen to Paul –

Paul wrote this second letter to Timothy during his second imprisonment in Rome, shortly before his death. This is how he ended his life -

2 Timothy 4:6-8 - *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.*

Third: Christ, the Qualified and Qualifier

The message is titled, “Modeling Christ,” because Jesus is the supreme example of someone who has won the “imperishable wreath”

This is how Jesus, “played and finished the game...”

Philippians 2:6-11 –

a) His Humiliation

- ⁶ *who, though he was in the form of God,*
- *did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,^[b]*
- ⁷ *but emptied himself,*
- *by taking the form of a servant,*
- *being born in the likeness of men.*
- ⁸ *And being found in human form,*

- *he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death,*
- *even death on a cross.*

b) His exaltation

- *⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him*
- *and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,*
- *¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*
- *¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

But, Jesus has not only qualified to win the prize. He qualifies us.

Galatians 2:20-21 - *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but **Christ who lives in me**. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ **I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.***

- I'm dead – *I have been crucified with Christ*
- Jesus lives in me – *It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.*
- I live looking to him for my salvation and growth – *And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God*
- I do not think that I can do it on my own - *for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.*

APP:

- a) If you think you can save yourself, you nullify God's grace
- b) If you think you can sanctify yourself – live the Christian life – you nullify God's grace

Conclusion:

The Southern Baptist Convention recently asked a third-party, Guidepost Solutions, to investigate the lack of accountability in the SBC concerning cases of sexual abuse as far back as the 1980s. In a 300-page report, Guidepost discovered that many people in SBC leadership were well aware of abuse cases, that some SBC national and local leaders are guilty of abuse, and even compiled a list of 703 offenders, but intentionally hid the information, buried the reports, protected the abusers, and discounted and mistreated the abused: both men and women.

I am telling you this because Heritage is a Southern Baptist Church and, as such, our elders have been monitoring the progress of these investigations and are grateful that the truth about these circumstances has now come to light.

But what has happened in the SBC corporately is a warning to Heritage as a body and each of us individually. By the Lord's grace, Heritage has never endured such hardship. But we must all, we must each, walk humbly, carefully, before the Lord, as Paul would say, in "self-control" and "discipline" so that we might win the prize and not be disqualified.

God has created each of us in his image. That image bestows dignity, worth, value and purpose on both men and women, boys and girls. Our church body is committed to this sacred task of modeling healthy relationships that reflect Trinitarian love. As such, we must treat one another – brother to brother, sister to sister, brother to sister and sister to brother - with that divine intent and according to that divine pattern.

It is heartbreaking to discuss such issues, but we must endure the pain of these conversations in order to live transparently and hold each other accountable to fight a good fight, finish the race, keep the faith (2 Tim 4:7) and hearing the Lord say, "*Well done*" (Matt 25:21). Our elders are committed to this task and ask you to also continue to "*walk worthy of your calling*" (Eph 4:1).

And now, we are going to point our hearts to God's solution to our fallen frailty, His mercy, which, as we will sing, is always "more."

Community Groups:

- 1 – Review the issues faced by the Corinthians in chapters 1-8.
- 2 – Read 9:19-23 – Why does Paul surrender his own preferences and live like those he's trying to reach?
- 3 – What two athletic events does Paul refer to in vs 24-26?
- 4 – Why might Paul be using the Isthmus or Olympic games as a reference?
- 5 – Read Philippians 1:27-30. What athletic phrase are there?
- 6 – What about Philippians 3:12-14?
- 7 – What athletic reference might be in Romans 11:11-12?
- 8 – What might 'discipline' look like for you?
- 9 – What does "run aimlessly" (v 26) mean?
- 10 – What does "beating the air" (v 26) mean?
- 11 – What might a "disqualification" (v 27) look like?
- 12 – Read Philippians 2:6-11. How has Jesus qualified to win His race?
- 13 – How does his qualification count as mine?
- 14 – Are there areas of your life where you are "running aimlessly" or "beating the air?"
- 15 – What will you do about this?