

1 Corinthians #15
Money and the Kingdom
1 Corinthians 9:1-9:27

Did you hear about the two University of Alabama football players that went hunting?

It seems that one of the tackles and the quarterback from the University of Alabama went hunting and as they are walking in the woods suddenly the quarterback falls to the ground and stops breathing and his eyes glaze over. The tackle grabs his cell phone and calls coach Shula and says, “Coach, we are out here hunting and the quarterback just died! What do I do?” Coach Shula says, “Take it easy, I can help. First let’s just make sure that he’s dead.” “Ok,” there is silence on the phone and then *there is a loud sound of a gun firing*. The voice returns to the phone, “Ok, Coach, now what?”

Although our intentions are good, sometimes we get our directions mixed up.

As one reads Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth we have to deal with items such as races, resources and results. And if we are not careful we will misunderstand just what he is trying to say to those early Christians.

As Paul continued to deal with the problems of spiritual pride, church division, and scriptural misapplication, he obviously had rubbed some of the people the wrong way. And the result was, as still is today when someone in church gets upset, they called into question his authority and authenticity as an apostle.

And, as is true in some cases today, the thing that surfaced was Paul’s right, or any other minister’s right, to get paid. Therefore, Paul’s responds to their questions in verses 3-16, “This is my answer to those who question my authority as an apostle. Don’t we have the right to live in homes and eat our meals? Don’t we have the right to bring a Christian wife along with us as the other disciples and the Lord’s brothers and Peter do? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have to work to support ourselves? What soldier has to pay his own expenses? And have you ever heard of a farmer who harvests his crop and doesn’t have the right to eat some of it? What shepherd takes care of a flock of sheep and isn’t allowed to drink some of the milk? And this isn’t merely human opinion. Doesn’t God’s law say the same thing? For the Law of Moses says, Do not keep an ox from eating as it treads out the grain. Do you suppose God was thinking only about oxen when he said this? Wasn’t he also speaking to us? Of course he was. Just as farm workers who plow fields and thresh the grain expect a share of the harvest, Christian workers should be paid by those they serve. We have planted good spiritual seed

among you. Is it too much to ask, in return, for mere food and clothing? If you support others who preach to you, shouldn't we have an even greater right to be supported? Yet we have never used this right. We would rather put up with anything than put an obstacle in the way of the Good News about Christ. Don't you know that those who work in the Temple get their meals from the food brought to the Temple as offerings? And those who serve at the altar get a share of the sacrificial offerings. In the same way, the Lord gave orders that those who preach the Good News should be supported by those who benefit from it. Yet I have never used any of these rights. And I am not writing this to suggest that I would like to start now. In fact, I would rather die than lose my distinction of preaching without charge. For preaching the Good News is not something I can boast about. I am compelled by God to do it. How terrible for me if I didn't do it!"

In order to understand what Paul is saying, he talks about running a race and making decisions. And he brings all of this to the surface by talking about the qualities of the Christian runner.

First of all, he says a Christian runner ought to run by the rules. He says this in verse 26, "So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I am not like a boxer who misses his punches."

Paul says if you are going to live the Christian life in a way the brings the greatest glory to the Lord of your salvation, there are some rules that you must embrace. And the first rule is that self must be set aside. Jesus put it this ways in Luke 9:23, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."

If you listen to our culture (and you don't have to listen too closely), it is a commonly held belief that following the rules is for other people. Being selfish in this generation is almost considered a virtue. But, God considers selfishness sin.

But what does selfishness have to do with Paul's ministry and/or authority? The answer is simple, now listen and get this, Paul is simply reminding them that their concern does not really come from their concern about the ministry, or even about other people, their problem has to do with their own selfishness.

Do you know what I have noticed through my years of ministry? I have noticed that many Christians, when they feel like they are being exposed, get angry, sometimes flat out nasty. And therein lays the difference between "spiritual" and "worldly" Christians.

Worldly Christians look to God primarily for personal fulfillment. They are saved, but self-centered. They love to attend concerts and enrichment seminars, because their own interests, needs and enjoyment come first. **Their prayers focus on their own needs, their own blessings, and their own happiness. It's a "me-first" faith: How can God make my life more comfortable?** When they give it is usually a "controlled" giving, therefore, they "designate" it a specific purpose. **Because they are involved in "controlled" giving, when they become upset or angry, they will use money as the subject of conversation. In short, they want to use God for their purposes instead of being used for his purposes.**

In contrast, the truly spiritual Christians know they were saved to serve, and made for a mission. They are eager to learn, eager to give, and excited about the privilege of being used by God. Spiritual Christians are the only fully-alive people on the planet. **Their joy, confidence, and enthusiasm are contagious because they know they are making a difference.** They wake up each morning expecting God to work through them in fresh ways. Now my question to you tonight is this: Which type of Christian do you want to be?

When dealing with this matter of "paying the preacher," Paul says this in 1 Timothy 5:17-18, "Let the elders (pastors) that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The laborer is worthy of his reward." The Greek reads something like this, "Elders (pastors) who do their work well should be paid well, especially those who work hard at both preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, Do not keep an ox from eating as it treads out the grain. And in another place, Those who work deserve their pay!"

But what about you? Many of you volunteer so much time, give your talents teaching Sunday School, singing in the choir, working on committees, and doing every new thing our Staff comes up with, as we continue to find new ways to minister and reach others for Christ. You never get paid for a single bit of it.

Many of you run by the rules. You love God. You put self on the back burner. Things get repaired, painted, donated. Programs get staffed, upgraded, and promoted. Every week our band rehearses and our choir meets while the rest of us are still at home. They practice, present and do it again - all for the glory of God.

That is the center of the issue of why you run! Now please listen to what I am about to say right here: **I am grateful for the salary I receive, but ladies and gentlemen, you do not pay me to preach, you pay me to live!**

Therefore, Paul says if we will ever deal with the issue of selfishness we will never have to deal with the issue of money. Why? Because it will not be the issue anymore!

Second, he says a Christian runner ought to run hard. Look at verse 27, “I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should.”

Age, temperament, physical condition and energy level aside, we all have 24 hours each day. We may all work at a different pace, see things differently, or approach tasks from perspectives that demand our special talents. The one thing we cannot afford is laziness.

There is a story about a farmer whose mule died. When his neighbor asked what was wrong with his mule, the farmer replied, “He starved to death.” When asked how such a thing could have happened, the farmer answered, “He was willing to swallow, but he was too lazy to chew.”

You can write this down: No church, family, business or individual ever truly achieved something worthwhile without hard work.

Remember, he said in verse 26, “I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step.” **And I must confess that sometimes that is not easy to do!** There are many areas of ministry that our church is involved with. We have missions, a food ministry, benevolent ministry, pre-school, children, youth, singles, Sr. adult, women, and pastoral care ministries. **And all of these things take money. And if we are not careful, we will take money from one to meet the needs of another!** **But if we would just be obedient in our giving in the first place, there would be no lack in any of these ministries!**

Third, he says a Christian runner ought to run every day. Paul makes this statement in Philippians 3:14, “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

Everyone knows to press toward something is to keep focused on the desired result. Bill McCartney is the founder of Promise Keepers. His testimony about life as a successful football coach includes a bridge of distraction.

"When I took the job as head football coach at the University of Colorado in 1982, I made a solemn promise: I told everybody that with me, God was first, family second, and football third.

But I didn't keep that promise for long. The thrill and the challenge of resurrecting a football program in disarray simply took too much time and

attention. As my teams kept winning year after year, I kept losing focus of my priorities.

When we won the national championship in 1990, many people said I had reached the pinnacle of my profession. But for me, there was emptiness about it. I had everything a man could want, and yet something was missing. I was so busy pursuing my career goals that I was missing out on the Spirit-filled life that God wanted me to have. All because I had broken my promise to put God first and foremost in my life.”

It is evident that most Christians aren't running every day when it comes to our stewardship. According to the latest statistics from Barna Research, a firm that tracks religious trends, although more than two out of three evangelical Christians (68%) claim to get their moral directions and decision-making guidance from Scripture, less than half that amount (33%) claim to tithe their income (which Scripture demands), and only about one in four (6%) actually tithes!

In 1815 Napoleon was defeated in the battle of Waterloo, and the hero of that battle was the Duke of Wellington. The duke's most recent biographer claims to have an advantage over all the other previous biographers. His advantage was that he had found an old account ledger that showed how the duke had spent his money: that, says the biographer, was a far better clue to what the duke thought was really important than reading his letters or his speeches.

Can you imagine that? If someone wrote your biography on the basis of your checkbook or your income-tax return, what might it say about you, your loyalties, your focus, and about whom you serve?

Last of all, he says a Christian runner ought to run to win. Look at verses 24, “Remember that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize. You also must run in such a way that you will win.”

Nike's logo is simply, “Just do it!” **What is the world does Nike shoes have to do with the Christian life?** Simple, the word “Nike” means “victory.” The Bible tells us in 1 John 5:4, “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” **Our victory is our faith in Christ. Running to win means trusting Christ for the victory.** Running to win is when we are willing to “walk by faith and not by sight.”

I recently saw a sign that said, “70% of Leaders Never Finish!” **That's what running to win is all about.** You see, the Christian life is not a 100 yard dash; it is lifetime of faithfulness, a lifetime of running to win. And I must confess to you tonight, I want to finish my course in pastoring, witnessing, being a husband,

father and grandfather, and as a good steward. I really do want to hear those words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” **What about you?**

If you have never been saved, why not tonight?