

The Home Builders

Week 10

Self-Discipline

Apply your heart to discipline and your ears to words of knowledge.

Proverbs 23:12

Perhaps the greatest example in the Bible of a disciplined Christ-follower is the apostle Paul. While we are often in danger of deifying him, we can all agree that this brilliant and highly pedigreed converted Jew followed after Jesus with his whole heart. Today he will serve as our example of a life disciplined for the cause of Christ.

1. Paul's Desire-1 Corinthians 9:19-23

Paul, desiring to be used of the Lord wrote, "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more" (1 Corinthians 9:19). He would alter his lifestyle, sacrifice his preferences, and/or lay aside his rights (as a Jew and a Roman citizen) in order to avoid becoming a stumbling block or an offense. Paul declared his willingness "to become all things to all men, so that [he] may by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:23). Without compromising the truth of the gospel or lowering the standards of his faith, he laid aside his personal privilege to engage the culture. It was not his purpose to offend Jew, Gentile, or those (weak ones) struggling to understand his message of salvation. Paul considered no cost too high in order to be a clean, useable vessel (see 2 Timothy 2:20-21) in the hand of the Lord!

2. Paul's Discipline-1 Corinthians 9:24-25

Paul wrote to his protégé Timothy, "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come" (1 Timothy 4:7-8). Paul disciplined himself for the purpose of godliness. He writes, "Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things" (1 Corinthians 9:25). The Greeks had two great athletic festivals, the Olympic and the Isthmian games. The latter was held near Corinth. Paul uses that marathon to illustrate his point and his readers would have an instant connection with his reference.

For nine months the competing athletes willingly invested hundred of hours in rigorous training. Daily workouts, special diets, and strict schedules were all a part of each competitor's workout routine. During the tenth month, the athletes gathered in Corinth to finalize their preparation under strict supervision.

All athletic competitors entered the race with the intention of winning. Mental toughness and physical prowess were put to the test as these athletes competed, knowing only one would emerge victorious. And what was the reward? A plaited olive-leaf crown, which probably faded before the ceremony was over! Certainly the victors would receive a measure of public adoration and accolades, but the generally short attention span of most fans, combined with the usually short careers of star athletes, guaranteed fame would be fleeting.

Paul compared the victor's perishable wreath with the believers' reward in heaven. "They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable" (1 Corinthians 9:25). That is, if athletes muster "such self-control in all things" for a garland of greenery, surely we can discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness! Believers in Jesus run to receive an imperishable crown, "the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award . . . on that day" (2 Timothy 4:8). We seek "an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven" (1 Peter 1:4).

A great difference between those races and the Christian race is that believers do not compete against each other! We compete against the obstacles of the world, the demands of our flesh, and the snares of the devil that would hinder us. "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1). Paul exhorts all believers to run in such a way that we might gain eternal reward by setting aside anything that might hinder the reception of the gospel.

3. Paul's Dread-1 Corinthians 9:26-27

Paul dreaded the inevitable consequences of unfaithfulness to the things of God. He was not afraid of losing his salvation, but losing his rewards for faithful, sacrificial service. We are not saved by running the race and winning. We run the race **because** we are saved. In Philippians Paul wrote, "I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do; forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-14).

Paul writes, "I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:27). Again Paul makes a reference to the Isthmian games. An athlete who failed to meet the training requirements was disqualified. Paul did not want to spend his life preaching God's requirements to others only to be disqualified (in the original language this word means "not approved, rejected, worthless") for not meeting God's standard.

Paul made himself "a slave to all" in order that he might win some to Christ. Paul disciplined his body to make it his slave in order to share Jesus and serve His Kingdom. Jesus said, "Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:27-28).

"Most people, including many Christians, are instead slaves to their bodies. Their bodies tell their minds what to do. Their bodies decide when to eat, what to eat, how much to eat, when to sleep and get up, and so on. An athlete cannot allow that. He follows the training rules, not his body. He runs when he would rather be resting, he eats a balanced meal when he would rather have a chocolate sundae, he goes to bed when he would rather stay up, and he gets up early to train when he would rather stay in bed. An athlete leads his body; he does not follow it. It is his slave, not the other way around" (1 Corinthians, J. F. MacArthur, p .215).

"Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge" (Proverbs 12:1). Beloved, may we pursue a life of "good discipline and the stability of faith in Christ" (Colossians 2:5). May we discipline ourselves "for the purpose of godliness" for "godliness is profitable in all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come" (1 Timothy 4:7-8). May we appropriate what God has provided for us. "For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7).

Beloved Home Builders, yield your life to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to rule and reign in your hearts and your lives.

By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches (Proverbs 24:3-4).