

LIVE WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT!

An exposition of 1 Corinthians 9:24-27
at West Hills Evergreen on April 29, 2018

INTRODUCTION: Brad's story of the first mate whose mind accidentally wandered for a few minutes and when he came back he had lost perspective concerning the ship's precise location. He had to wake the captain, and the captain said, YOU DID THE RIGHT THING.

PROBLEM: Losing perspective can be a costly, even dangerous thing. Without a healthy perspective, relatively unimportant things can seem like the most important things...and the most important things, find themselves relegated to the place of less important things. If that happens for a day...and you realize it afterward it's not a huge deal...but it's still a wasted day. But what happens if you lose perspective for a week? Or a month? Or 6 months? How do you think that will affect your life, and your ability to love and serve your God?

Without a healthy, clear, lucid perspective on life...without a biblical, God-centered, love-prioritized perspective on the universe...you can accidentally burn decades of your life on a hamster wheel of meaningless, useless, pointless, pursuits. This thing I want so bad...this place I so badly want to go...this praise from man that is so important to me...this thing I want to give my kids...this future I want to create and control...when those things are what shape your perspective on the present or the future...when things like that are what dominate how you shape your priorities...when stuff like that is at the center...God isn't. You are building your house upon the sand as Jesus said...you have lost perspective...and there is only one thing you can do...snap out of it...and wake the captain.

Wake up and seek the one who offers you perfect perspective on everything in His Word. I want to offer you God's perspective on our lives this morning...and I want to do this for our blessing. I want to do this to spare us from the heart break of waking up one day and realizing we have burned decades on hamster wheel...I want to spare us from waking up one day with profound regret because we have let something or someone other than God shape our perspective on the present and on the future, and your regret extends **forever into eternity**. Here is what I hope to show you from the Word this morning:

MAIN POINT: You are called to live for eternal blessings in Christ, so live with all your might.

SETTING THE CONTEXT: We are back in 1 Corinthians 9 this morning and we will be picking up Paul's argument from where we left off last week in verse 24. For those of you who have not been with us, Paul has been addressing a conflict within the congregation in the city of Corinth about how to handle the question of whether or not Christians should eat idol meat. Idol meat being food that had been sacrificed to a pagan God, and afterward repackaged and sold in the market place.

And here is the crux of the issue...some people in the church were saying, look there is no God but one...idols don't have any real power or existence...my good theology teaches me that I am totally free to eat this meat offered to the pagan gods of Rome. On the other hand...

there were some in the church who had come out of deeply pagan backgrounds. And because of their former association with idols...couldn't eat idol meat without feeling like they were participating in the worship of a pagan god. And Paul recognizes that if the "STRONG" people make a habit of going and eating meat at the pagan temples...eventually one of these "WEAKER" brothers is going to walk by and see them and be encouraged to think...OH THAT SMART GUY EATS IDOL MEAT? Apparently I can embrace Jesus and worship other God's at the same time. Paul's concern is that because the "STRONG" Corinthians were insisting upon their rights it might result in the "WEAK" embracing a false gospel that would lead to the destruction of their souls. After all the triune God says you shall worship the LORD YOUR GOD only and shall have no other god's before me. You can't embrace polytheism without forsaking the commandments of our God.

And so Paul's response to this has been to strongly exhort the "STRONG". He's made the point that if you think you have good theology but you don't know how to act like Jesus in a situation like this you don't actually know anything. He has then proceeded to explain by his own example that we should be willing to lay down any and every right for the salvation of others. We should for the joy set before us should even be willing to endure suffering and sacrifice so that by all means some might be saved. There is nothing more important than that. And having developed this point...Paul is going to bring his argument to a crescendo by talking about WHY...why we would do this. What shapes the perspective of someone who is willing to live this way. Let's now turn our complete attention to the end of chapter...let's humble our minds and open our hearts for the reading of the Word of the Lord.

READING: (1 Cor 9:24–27) *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.*

PRAYER: Loving Father, you who are in heaven, holy is your name. God we ask that your kingdom would come and that your will would done in us and in our church and on the earth...as it is in heaven. What can one mortal say to another about what is important in eternity? Nothing. Only you can teach us what matters forever and ever. No one needs me this morning, we all need you. I pray Spirit that you would bring conviction of sin, that you would strengthen our resolve for holiness and love, that you would break hard hearts and bring healing to broken ones. Create in us a clean heart, and make us fruitful for the kingdom of God. In Jesus name, Amen.

ROAD MAP: 1.) Paul's great commission to the church, 2.) Paul's great contrast for God's people, 3.) Paul's greatest concern at the end of the day, 4.) how do we live out of Paul's example

Paul's GREAT COMMISSION

1. Let's begin by unpacking verse 24. Paul starts by asking "*Do you not know that in a race, all the runners run, but only one receives the prize?*"

1. Paul appeals to an example that would have been as familiar to the Corinthians as the word GOOGLE is to us. The Olympics. Or possibly the smaller closer event called the Isthmian games which were just as popular. Paul literally says in greek, don't you know that in a stadium all the runners run...the stadium of course being the place where the olympic events took place.
 2. So he says think about the super popular sports in your city...the sports in your city are an illustration for the Christian life. If Paul was preaching here this morning...he likely would have said think about the Oakland A's and the San Francisco Giants...think about the San Jose Sharks or the Golden State Warriors...don't you know when these teams play an opponent only one of them can win.
 3. When you see Steve Curry holding up the championship trophy whatever it's called in the NBA...when you see these guys crying out with shouts of victory...when you see grown men weeping for joy after winning a GAME...that is meant to teach you something about living in this life for Christ.
 4. God ordained sports in your city, to give you a living analogy for what entering into the triumph of Christ is going to look and feel like forever and ever.
2. Do you not know...he asks...that in the NFL...only one team holds the Lombardi trophy at the end of the season? So run that YOU MAY OBTAIN IT.
 3. So there are two things I want to clarify here. The first is Paul clarifies in the second sentence what he means by the first sentence. We are not racing EACH OTHER in the Christian life. It's not like this is a contest and if I live a more godly life than you I win and you lose. That's not what he means. He says run that you may obtain the prize. He is describing the manner in which you run. Run as someone who is intent on entering victory... He means run as someone who is fixated on winning the same way that the athletes on your favorite sports team train relentlessly so that they can enter into victory.
1. Now the question I want to pose to you is how does someone do that? How does someone live the Christian life as though they want to enter into the glorious triumph of Jesus? By doing as little as possible? By giving God 15 minutes in the morning and ignoring Him the rest of the day? What do you think Paul means by this illustration?
 2. Paul says you should imitate Olympic athletes in your walk with Christ...that can only mean one thing to someone familiar with the ancient Olympics. Your love and desire for the prize, should be all consuming. It should be the primary thing that shapes your perspective on the present and the future.
 3. Olympic athletes were famous in the ancient world for their all consuming passion to bring honor and glory to their family and to their home town by winning in the Olympics. It consumed them. It's what they thought about, and trained for, and organized their entire life around. Winning was everything...and anything less than victory would feel like disgrace. Paul says live like that as a Christian.
 4. If someone came and observed your life, and was able to chart how you used your mind...what you focused on...if they could look into your heart and make a graph of what your heart longed for or worried about at the beginning and the end of the day. If they were to draw a diagram of what you tended to organize your life around: what

would be at the top of the list? What would be second? What would be third? Where is God?

5. I know that is probably a convicting mental exercise for most of us but this is why we come to the Word with fear and trembling...to be shaken out of our stupor so that we don't burn decades of our life consumed with things that don't matter.
6. If you are looking at your life this morning and saying...I don't feel like God is number one on my list...what should I do? The answer is repent of your sins and draw near to the God of mercy and steadfast love. The answer is to say God I'm sorry I've lived putting other things before you...that is sin...please forgive me. And to embrace the forgiveness purchased by the blood of Christ on the cross and to say God what should my life look like...what should I cut, what should I keep? What should I give more time to and what do I need to scale back from and be willing to follow what the Word says WHERE EVER IT LEADS.
7. The answer is to decide in your heart...I will not clutch onto temporal things at the expense of eternal things. I will not clutch on to my right to eat idol meat at the expense of my brother or sisters salvation. I will not latch on to anything that is going to keep me from pursuing the prize...the blessings of the gospel with all my strength. That is the first thing I want to clarify...Paul is not saying we are racing each other...he is exhorting us to live the Christian life in way that is all consumed with victory!
4. The second thing I want to clarify is that this great commission we receive from Paul "run that you may obtain it" is in the plural. In English, when we say YOU over there, we can mean either one person or multiple people. In Greek they distinguish between you the individual and you the plural by different word forms.
 1. This is not a command given to an individual, this is a command given to the church. To a group of people. To a local church family composed of strong people and weak people. In other words...this is something Paul commissions us to do together. And he does this because we need each other.
 2. We NEED to be in purposeful fellowship, we need to be in relationships established on the mutual pursuit of Jesus as our ultimate prize. And the reason is that this kind of singleminded determination is difficult to maintain in a fallen world, while you remain in a fallen body. We need someone to check in with us and ask...how are you doing about being single-minded in your pursuit of Jesus? And when our response is...not as well as I would like...to say okay, let's pray and talk through how you can get back on track.
 3. West Hills EVERGREEN...this is the OTHER great commission from the Apostle Paul...RUN THAT YOU MAY OBTAIN THE PRIZE TOGETHER AS A local church family. The right application of this verse is not to simply ask how I the individual can get better at doing this...but also to ask: how can I help others get better at this also?
5. So this is Paul's great commission...live with a singleminded passion for Jesus...and for entering into glory with Him forever. Let Olympic athletes serve as a living analogy for what it looks like to live as though you intend on achieving victory. Let's now turn our attention to Paul's great contrast.

Paul's GREAT CONTRAST

1. Now in Verse 25 Paul is going to explain why this should be an all consuming passion for us by laying out a profound contrast. He says “Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.”
2. In the ancient olympics, the goal wasn’t to be given a medal but to be crowned with a wreath. Athletes refused to eat heavy foods or drink flavored wines because they knew it would be detrimental to their training. They exerted their body to the point of exhaustion... they would wake up and train whether it was warm or cold, sunny or rainy. They devoted their body to their training whether they felt like it or not, whether they wanted to in the moment or not...
3. And they would do this because ever since they were kids they would have gone to the games, and at the end of the race watched the victor take the stage and be crowned with a wreath. And they would have watched as everyone cheered and praised them and chanted their name. And you would see their parents with tears in their eyes hugging their son with pride and gratitude as everyone from their home town would swell and rejoice with pride that a son of their city had been victorious in the games.
4. When we watch the Olympics on TV...especially the popular events with the human interest stories...and you see those people win and you see the whole world rejoice...and it’s everywhere on social media and in the news and the world is abuzz uttering this person’s name...you are seeing basically the same thing.
5. When you see the glory honor and praise that comes with entering into the victory of that wreath it makes you want it...and it causes people to bring their entire lives under the controlling motive of winning that crown.
6. And Paul wants you to look at that...to think about that...to think about all the gold medals that Michael Phelps has won....and hear the word PERISHING...I mean...who won the most medals in the history of the ancient olympics? Anyone know? No. You know why... because the greatest glories of earth are perishing...they are temporal...they decay...they won’t last...they will pass away. Every word of praise you receive from man...every award on the wall...every monument erected in your name...is going to perish...it will echo away and never be heard again.
7. We aren’t called to live for perishable things...God in this text is calling us to live for imperishable things...for glory that will not and cannot fade. The apostle Peter calls it in 1 Peter 1:4-5 an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
 1. When Paul says they live for a perishable wreath but we an imperishable...that is a literal translation of the greek but it is assumed that the imperishable thing we are living for is an imperishable wreath...or an imperishable crown. Now what is this referring to? I think this is referring to the glory of the resurrection. Paul is going to say in 1 Corinthians 15:52 that when Christ returns...the dead will be raised imperishable. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death where is your sting?”

2. Listen to me church...when you watch the NBA finals this year...if that is something you do...and the series ends...and you see grown men rejoicing with tears and shouts of victory...when you see grown men slumped over on the floor weeping with inexplicable joy...that their labors have come to fruition...they conquered and achieved their crown...
YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO LOOK AT THAT AND SAY THAT IS THE small perishable version of what I WILL experience forever when I'm raised with Christ.
8. These guys exercised self-control for a perishable crown...and God has called me to live for an imperishable one. If they exercise self-control for something that God says is smaller than what He promises us in eternity...how much more should I exercise self-control in pursuit of a single-minded devotion to Christ.
 1. How much more should I be self-disciplined to keep my heart in a place where I am willing to lay down idol meat, where I'm willing to lay down my phone, my favorite show on TV...where I'm willing to lay down my comfort..., my job...where I'm willing to lay down my very life for the imperishable crown that God offers to us in Christ.
9. How much more...look at the perishable stuff and ask...if God is offering me an imperishable version of THAT...how much more should I be willing to repent and follow Christ wherever He would have me go? How much more should I be willing to put my faith in God and live for Him with all my might?
 1. Not a burden we bear, not a sorrow we share, but our toil he doth richly repay. Not a grief or a loss, not a frown or a cross, but is blessed if we trust and obey. But we can prove the delights of his love until all on the alter we lay; for the favor he shows, for the joy he bestows are for them who will trust and obey. Trust and obey for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.
10. So here is what we have seen so far. First Paul laid down his great commission for the church...live with a single-minded all consuming passion for Christ. Second we saw the great contrast he offered as a foundation for his point...if we do this it comes with the promise of something greater than all the glories of an Olympic victory...namely entering into the victorious resurrection of Christ and reigning with him in victory forever and ever. Let's now turn our attention to Paul's great concern for himself and the church when it comes to this matter.

Paul's GREATEST CONCERN

1. Paul says in verse 26, so I don't run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air.
 1. He says if the finish line is THAT WAY...I don't use my time running circles over there for 20 minutes. If I'm in a boxing match and my opponent is right HERE...I don't turn around and start throwing punches in that direction...
 2. Here is the idea...you are exerting yourself on something...you are pouring your life into something...and that something is leading you closer to victory in Christ or it is wasted motion. It's either bringing you closer to your prize, God Himself and the glory he offers at the resurrection...or it's not.
 3. And what Paul is saying is...I don't believe in wasted motion. I don't run aimlessly. I don't box as one beating air. Instead I try to make my whole life about one thing... entering into the victory of Jesus Christ and the power of his resurrection. Here is what that means...

2. Paul doesn't waste his time fighting the wrong battles...being anxious about what he will eat and what he will drink or what he will wear...he knows Jesus taught him to seek first the kingdom and God would add all these things to him. Paul doesn't let himself get stressed out about things that God has promised.
 1. His faith in God and His single-minded commitment to serving Christ enables him to freely surrender his right to a pay check from the Corinthians. Being compensated wasn't the battle...their faith was the battle he wanted to fight.
 2. Similarly, Paul doesn't let this issue about idol meat become a theological debate... because that is not the heart of the battle...the issue is about love and worship. Are you living for Christ? If you are living for Christ you would gladly lay your rights down as for the good of others just like He did.
 3. Paul doesn't fight the wrong battles because Paul doesn't believe in wasting energy and motion. And Paul knows...in his life...and in your life...there is one battle that is more central to a life of faith than any other verse 27.
3. The biggest battle you have been called to fight in this world is not against the devil...it's not against the world...it's not against your circumstances or your human enemies...the greatest battle you have been called to fight is the battle against your own sin...Paul's says I don't box like one beating the air...verse 27 instead I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.
4. This text sounds a lot harsher in Greek and is subject to being misunderstood...Paul says I don't push air...I blacken the eye of my body and keep it under control. I don't waste all my time trying to fight battles out here...I'm primarily concerned with fighting the battle in here.
5. Now to be clear...the body isn't bad and Paul isn't saying we should physically harm ourselves when we sin. Your body is a gift from God. And when Paul says I strike myself... he isn't saying I literally punch myself in the face. He is using metaphorical language the same way Jesus did when the Lord taught us...if your right eye is causing you to sin...pluck it out...because it's better to enter heaven with one eye than to go to hell with two.
 1. Now here in this context, Paul uses olympic imagery...the same way a boxer strikes decisively at his opponent...I purposely and diligently strike at my own sin. Punching myself in the face won't cause my heart to stop being greedy. Plucking out your eye won't take the lust out of your heart...only the gracious power and presence of the Spirit can uproot sin from human hearts through faith. Paul uses this imagery to describe the seriousness with which he fights his sin.
 2. Your problem Corinthians...your battle and mine...is not with the weaker or the stronger Christians in the church...that battle is with yourself and your sin.
 3. Samuel shooting me in the face with a nerf gun...the most significant battle in that moment is not the fact that he's not supposed to be playing with that gun...it's not that we don't point guns at people's faces...it's not that I had just asked him to please let mommy and I talk for a few minutes b/c she just got home from the prayer brunch...
 4. The biggest and most significant battle for me in that moment is my battle against my sin...my proclivity to react in anger when someone causes me unjustified pain...my biggest battle in that moment is to not allow my flesh to repay evil with evil but to love my son and to repay his evil with loving fatherly correction.
 5. Your battle is your sin...before it's anything else. As we exercise self-control in pursuit of eternal glorying Christ, our training and preparing involves warring against our sin that would pull us away from our single-minded pursuit of Jesus.

6. And we do the verse 27 because This is the only battle that if lost can result in you be shown false...lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. The word disqualified is a sports word so it fits in the context but what it literally says is lest after preaching to others I myself would be shown to be unqualified...or false. Think of a metal being tested in a furnace to distinguish it's true content. I fight my sin so that I don't spend my life calling others to repent and believe and fail to repent and believe myself.
 1. Now listen...verse 27 describes the Christian life and the war against your sin as a fist fight. As a bare knuckle street brawl. Eyes get black in this kind of fight. Noses bleed, knuckles break...the fight against sin is not joke.
 2. The fight against sin is not something you can do with half your heart. You are either fighting to win or you are losing. What am I saying...I'm saying sin you cannot live with tolerated sin in your life. If you are living with tolerated sin in your life Paul says you should be very concerned that after you have preached to others you yourself aren't shown to be false.
 3. That's scary. If that doesn't put fear and trembling into your heart I'm concerned for you. None of us are perfected yet...but all of us are called to hunger and thirst for righteousness. When we stumble and fall, we repent and get back up and resolve to keep walking in holiness. Stumbling and falling is not the problem...we all have temptation...we all fail...and there is infinite, life-purifying mercy for anyone who is penitent shed at the cross of the Son of God.
 4. The problem is when you stop being penitent...when you stop feeling heart broken over your sin...the problem is when you start to make peace with it. When you stop fighting. When you start justifying it...and your heart becomes cold to God...your thoughts become distant from him...your conscience becomes harder and your faith begins to die.
 5. If That's you this morning.... **COME BACK** you are wandering away to an eternal sorrow...eternal torment...eternal death under the wrath of God. Jesus speaks to people who were in this situation in Revelation 3 at the church in Laodicea. And do you know what he said to them?
 1. He said in Rev 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. Jesus says I'm right here this morning...asking you to let me in...I know your sins...I know your sloth...I know how far you've wandered from the green pastures of my love...and here am I knocking...and all you have to do is let me in...and I will come in and feast with you. It will be just like it was before...just open your heart to me.
 2. Don't turn away from the mercies of the Redeeming Lord...your sins are not worse than Jesus' blood was precious. He died to save you...let Him save you. Paul's great concern was that he would not be shown false at the end of his ministry. And I want to quickly ask the question why...
7. Paul tells us in verse 23 that his greatest burden in not being disqualified is not fear of hell...and that is saying something because hell is utterly terrifying...his burden...His great concern for Himself and the church is that they would all together share in the blessings of the gospel...
8. What is the blessings of the gospel...the blessings are God Himself. 1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous that he might bring us to God. God Himself is the fountain from which all other blessings flow. From God comes salvation and forgiveness of sins...from God will come the redemption of our bodies and the renewal

of the universe...from God comes the gift of the Spirit and access to His throne of mercy... from God comes our adoption as sons and daughters...and from God comes his sovereign reign over all things causing all to work together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purposes...there are a billion blessings in the gospel and all of them trace backwards like beams from the sun up into the person of the triune God Himself.

9. I live this way Paul says...I strike my sin with a sledge hammer...I exercise self-control...I become all things to all people that by all means I might save some...because God has promised Himself as the inheritance of ALL who put their hope in Him. And this is Paul's singleminded concern. That the glory of God would fill the earth the way the water covers the seas because His glory is that wonderful.
10. Is that how you want to live? If you are saying to yourself I want that...how do I become more like that I have four suggestions for you as you leave here.

Living out PAUL's EXAMPLE

1. Worship - set your mind on the greatness, and the goodness, and the holiness and the loving kindness of your God
2. Word - filling your mind with what God has said and done...reading your bible yes...but also memorizing scripture...listening to music that holds out glory to you...thinking back on how God has dealt faithfully with you in space and time...talking with people about it. Listening to creation bear witness to the glory of the LORD...stars tell me how great HE IS...sparrows tell me how caring he is...flowers tell me how generous he is...filling your mind with what God has said and done...
3. Prayer...and this is all meant to lead you into intimate communion with Him.
4. Speak...tell others about the excellencies of God who has ransomed you from darkness and into His marvelous light.

COMMUNION: