

Series: 1 Corinthians
Title: So Run
Text: 1 Corinthians 9: 23-26
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1 Corinthians 9: 24: Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. 25...Now they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. 26: I therefore so run, not as uncertainly;

The believer's life of faith is compared to a race.

Hebrews 12: 1: Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,...

God determines who shall run this race. By sovereign electing grace, God chose who will run in this race. Every chosen child of God shall be put in this race and each one shall finish and none shall be lost.

Those Christ redeemed from the curse of the law, those Christ made complete in his righteousness are put in this race. His satisfied justice together with his everlasting mercy demands each one Christ redeemed be put in this race and demands they be kept so they finish it.

The Holy Spirit regenerates us and puts us in this race giving faith to trust Christ our Salvation. So God is the one who determines who runs this race by his free and sovereign grace in Christ Jesus his Son.

Also, Christ is the Way in whom we run this race. "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (Jn 14: 6) The Spirit took us out of the way of death—out of the way to hell—and put us in Christ the Way—"Of [God] are ye in Christ Jesus." (1 Cor 1: 30)

Concerning the course of this race, the course of our life which we must run is set by God's sovereign hand. Every trial, every cross, every dark valley as well as every sunny hill and every beautiful seascape "is set before us." (Heb 12: 1)

We run this race by faith looking to Christ alone by faith. "The sin that does so easily beset us" is unbelief. By God's grace we are to lay unbelief aside and run this race:

Hebrews 12: 2: Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Sadly, some here are not yet in the race because ye do not yet believe on Christ. Christ says to you:

Matthew 7: 13: Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: 14: Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Luke 13:24: Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

Perhaps, there are others here who are in this race but you have run into hindrances. The Spirit said through Paul:

Galatians 5:7: Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?

SO RUN, THAT YE MAY OBTAIN

In our text, the Spirit tells us through Paul how every believer is to run this race: we are to run this race to win the prize. Believers are to run to obtain—run to win—**1 Corinthians 9: 24: Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.**

In a race, there are many runners. And they all run. So it is in the race of faith. We must all run. Thomas Watson said, “All have run from God by sin and all must run to Him by repentance!”

But here is Paul’s main point: all run but only one receives the prize! He says, “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.”

It is not enough to start in this race; it is not even enough to persevere almost to the end; we must finish the race. “We are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.” (Heb 10: 39)

But he says even more: he says run this race to obtain the prize. In the race of faith there shall be many victors. Every chosen, redeemed child of God shall be the winner in the race of faith. Christ said of all the Father has given him, “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand.” (Jn 10: 28)

But the point of the text is, that each believer should run to win like that one winner in the Olympic games runs to win. We are not to compete with one another but we are to run with determination to win the prize.

Illustration: The Tennessee Race

Brethren, we show what we can do when we are really in earnest about getting something; and we show how little we will do when we do not care whether we get the prize or not. It is sad if the things that are seen and temporal get the larger portion of our energy while the things that are unseen and eternal get only what is left. So run, that ye may obtain.

SO RUN, NOT AS UNCERTAINLY

Secondly, we are to so run as runners who are looking to a certain known prize—**1 Corinthians 9: 25...Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. 26: I therefore so run, not as uncertainly.**

He says of the Greek runners, “Now they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown.” Many in religion are running uncertainly to obtain a corrupt crown like those in the Grecian Olympics.

The Grecians received a crown made of olive leaves. It was a corruptible crown. There is a host of religious folks who want themselves to be crowned above others in heaven. That is an earthly, sinful motive for a corrupt crown.

The Greek winners received applause and recognition from men. That was a corruptible crown. There is a host in religion who run to win the same by their preaching, by their prayers, by their uppermost seats. Christ said that when they get their applause of men, they have their reward. That is a corruptible prize.

The Greeks ran to honor their idol gods Jupiter and Neptune. Sadly, I fear most in religion are doing the same. They are running to help their idol god because he is too weak to save without them. That is a corruptible crown.

Yet, of true believers, the Holy Spirit says we are running this race not uncertainly—but with certainty—because we know the crown-prize set before us is not a corruptible crown—“but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly.” What is the incorruptible crown which believers run toward knowing with certainty this is an incorruptible crown?

In the context, the incorruptible crown Paul sought was the salvation of those God chose and Christ redeemed. He ran with a certain aim, to preach Christ that he might see Christ save and win lost sinners. Paul denied his own liberty that they might be saved through the gospel. He said, “I am made all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I might be partaker thereof with *you*. Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize?...Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible I therefore so run, not as uncertainly.”

We see that Paul was running to see sinners won to Christ by the power and grace of God by what he said to the Philippian believers:

Philippians 2: 14: Do all things without murmurings and disputings: 15 That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; 16 Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.

Then he called them his crown of joy:

Philippian 4: 1: Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, *my* dearly beloved.

Again, to the Thessalonians, Paul said:

1Thessalonians 2:19: For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Are* not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and our joy.

It is no wonder, Paul should delight over Christ’s people as his crown of rejoicing, Christ does the same:

Zechariah 9:16: And the LORD their God shall save them in that day as the flock of his people: for *they shall be as* the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land.

Isaiah 62:3: Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God.

So, first, we who have already been saved by God’s grace are put in this race to run—preaching the gospel of Christ—running to obtain this certain prize of seeing God’s elect, Christ’s redeemed, won to Christ by the irresistible grace of God. Those called out by God’s grace are our incorruptible crown of rejoicing.

Also, every believer runs this race with certain expectation of another incorruptible crown called righteousness. The apostle Paul told Timothy:

2 Timothy 4: 7: I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: 8: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

We are not looking to be given an actual crown. But what better emblem could represent the righteousness of Christ, which every believer shall be fully made in that day we finish this race! This is the righteousness of Christ our King! The righteousness he worked out for his people by his obedience unto the death of the cross.

Also, we shall receive the crown of eternal life:

James 1:12: Blessed *is* the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

Revelation 2:10: Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

Christ is our Crown of Life. Life is to be one in Christ with Christ in us for all eternity. That is eternal Life! This Life is certain to believers because Christ promised it to those who finish the race: “be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

In addition, believers who finish this race trusting in Christ alone are promised the crown of eternal glory with Christ:

1 Peter 5: 1: The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: 2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 Neither as being lords over *God's* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

What is this crown of glory? It is to be eternally in glory with Christ, to be eternally glorified with Christ, to be eternally praising the glory of Christ.

All three of these crowns are summed up in the prize of winning Christ and the high calling of God in Christ:

Philippians 3: 8: Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, 9: And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: 10: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; 11: If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. 12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, [all my former vain works] and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

After hearing this keep this in mind. As believers we know and are certain that Christ shall not fail. He has justified all his people. He shall call out all his people. He shall bring all his people to glory. He is our Crown: our Righteousness, our Life, our Glory. Our prize is entirely by his grace alone as his free gift to us!

So knowing this gospel and knowing he has sent us to preach his gospel, as our text says, “So run to obtain and so run, not as uncertainly.” Our two certain aims in this race are to run with the gospel of Christ aiming to see Christ win sinners to himself by his grace and to run to the end believing Christ so that at last we win Christ himself.

Amen!