

CORINTHIANS - The MORE EXCELLENT WAY

STUDY 10

Stewards, Self-denial & Self-discipline

I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. And I do all things for the sake of the gospel ... 1 COR.9:22,23

Study 10a: Paul's Philosophy of Apologetics (9:17-27)

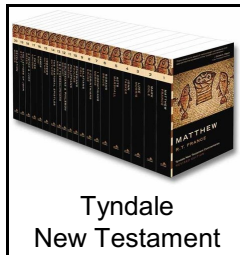
9:17-19 How does Paul's attitude to financial support mirror his philosophy of apologetics (i.e. building bridges, not walls)

[v.16] Once he wrote, "My Gospel," in writing to the Romans. This was a burden upon his heart for evermore, his sense of the deposit committed to him, entrusted to him, and of his consequent responsibility for that deposit. In this very chapter the word "Gospel" occurs nine times. It is running all the way through the Gospel, his sense of the supreme importance of his deposit. [Morgan 117]

9:20-23 Here we have the best summation of what we might call *the incarnational principle of apologetics* (Heb.2:14-18)

To the Jews he *became as a Jew*. The sort of thing that is in mind is his conduct in circumcising Timothy. He would not needlessly antagonize his own nation. He respected Jewish scruples ... The Christian is 'not' under the law, but under grace' (Rom. vi.14). Yet Paul conformed to practices which would enable him to approach *them that are under the law* with greater acceptability. [Morris 138]

When he preached to the Jews, you will find instance after instance in the book of Acts where he turned them back to the Old Testament, to their Jewish ceremonies and laws, and based everything upon the Jews' hope of the Messiah, showing how all has been fulfilled in Christ. On the other hand, when speaking to the Gentiles,



"To the Jews I became as a Jew"

men who did not know the law of Moses, he put himself on a level with those to whom he spoke. He talked of God, the Creator of all things, who gives us "rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17). The God who does all this cannot be an image, an idol made with man's hands. He created the heavens and the earth. And then he undertakes to show how God has sent His Son to save men who have sinned against Him; he puts the gospel in a way that the Gentiles may understand it. [Ironsides 257]

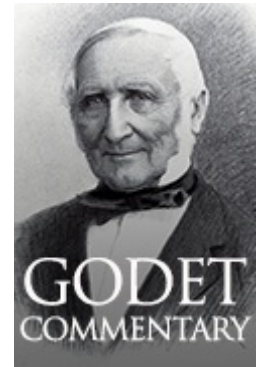
9:24-27 How does the NT model of stewardship prevent us from missing the point of our salvation? (6:20; 2 Cor.5:14,15; 6:1-3ff) [NOTE: the *incarnational principle* at work -- Paul uses his intimate knowledge of Greek life to make vivid his point about our need to STRIVE; cf.2 Tim.4:7,8)

The Christian must not only start but continue in the right way; it is implied that he must put forth all his strength. The process also implies self-discipline -- not a strong point with the Corinthians. [Barrett 217]

[v.24] ... the apostle borrows a figure from the most exciting spectacle which Greek life presented. Every two years there were celebrated near Corinth the Isthmian games, which, like the other public games of Greece, such as the Olympic and Nemean games, include the five exercises of leaping throwing the discus, racing, boxing, and wrestling. All Greece witnessed these competitions with the warmest interest, and the athlete who was proclaimed the victor received the admiration and homage of the whole nation ... It is quite probable, as the same author says, that, during the two years Paul had passed at Corinth, he had himself witnessed the Isthmian games, at least once. -- Paul makes use here only of the two exercises of racing and boxing ... The better to inculcate the manner in which they should act, he seeks at that very moment to make himself a Greek to the Greeks, borrowing from their national life the figures most fitted to strike their imagination. -- It has often and justly been remarked, how frequent these figures, borrowed from the contests of the stadium, are in the authors of the New Testament Epistles (Phil. iii.; 2 Tim. iv.; Heb. xii, etc.), while they are wholly strange to the discourses of Jesus in the Gospels. [Godet 471,477]

[v.27] This **prize** is not a **perishable wreath** like that of pine (earlier parsley or wild celery) awarded in the Isthmian Games; it was the **imperishable** 'prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus', for which Paul pressed on 'toward the goal' (Phil. 3:14). This **prize**, to be awarded on the 'day of Christ', was his constant incentive to **run** straight for the tape, not **aimlessly**; or, turning from the race-course to the boxing ring, not in indulge in shadow-boxing but to get home with every punch ... These vividly figurative words do not denote literal self-flagellation, but describe the moral discipline to which he constantly subjected himself, lest anything else should displace the paramount aim of his life, the proclamation of the gospel. Self-discipline involves a voluntary curtailment of one's rights & liberties ... [Bruce 89]

What is the prize at the end of the race? For a young Greek it would not be citizenship. It was a law with the Greeks that no young man could contend in the games unless he could prove that he was of pure Greek parentage; that had to be settled before he became a contestant ... And now, as in the family of God, we are running a race, not to get to heaven for, as far as that is concerned, "It is not of him



that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy" (Rom.9:16), but we are running a race for reward for Christian service, Christian responsibility, and if we run our race well, there is a reward at the end. If we fail in the race, we fail in the reward. We do not fail of heaven, of salvation, because our work is not all it ought to be or all we would like it to be. "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (1 Cor. 3:15), provided he is a Christian ... The gift of righteousness is ours by faith. Every believer has been made the righteousness of God in Christ, but the *crown* of righteousness is the reward given to those who behave themselves in the light of the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do you love His appearing? How do you show it? By ordering your behaviour now in view of His close return. "Every man that hath this hope set on Him purifieth himself even as He is pure" (1 John 3:3). [Ironsides 264,265,271]

Paul's fear was not that he might lose his salvation, but that he might lose his crown through failing to satisfy his Lord (cf. iii.15). [Morris 140]

Why bother if we're saved anyway?

... the Christian must strain every nerve to produce his finest effort ... *Striveth for the mastery* renders a verb, *agonizomai*, which means 'to compete in the Games'. It gives us the word 'agony' from which we see that no half-hearted effort is meant ... The strenuous self-denial of the athlete in training for his fleeting reward is a rebuke to all half-hearted, flabby Christian service. [Morris 139]

In the application, the *goal* is no more identical with the *prize*, than in the actual case. The goal is perfect holiness; the prize is glory, the crown of holiness. Of course, in mentioning the fact that out of a number of runners only one reaches the goal first, and obtains the prize, the apostle does not mean, that of the multitude of Christians only one will be saved. What he desires to inculcate by the figure is, that to succeed in the Christian race, one must labour for his salvation with same energy and the same resolution to reach the goal of holiness, as this one victor to reach the goal of the race. Like him, the Christian must learn to forget everything else, that he may see only the goal to be reached. They are not very many, Paul means, who, while calling themselves Christians, run after this manner! ... they ought to beware, those Corinthians -- fond of their ease and obstinately attached to their rights and liberties -- lest they be in the end like those slack runners who lose the prize ... During the ten months before the day of the games, the competitors lived in sustained exercises and with special self-denial, abstaining from everything that could exhaust or weight the body. For the Christian, whose conflict is a matter, not of a day, but of the whole life, abstinence, the condition of progress in sanctification, is consequently an exercise to be renewed daily. -- The abstinence of the athletes did not relate only to criminal enjoyments, but also to gratifications in themselves lawful; so the Christian's self-denial should bear, not only on guilty pleasures, but on every habit, on every enjoyment which, without being vicious, may involve a loss of time or a diminution of moral force. [Godet 471-473]

You may be a church-member taking more or less part in so-called Christian work, but see to it that there is a real work of grace in your own soul, or the day may come when you will be utterly disapproved and you will find yourself outside the

number of those who enter into the Father's house in that day, not because you were once saved and are so no longer, but because your life has proved that you were never truly born of God [Ironsides 276]

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