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1 Corinthians

And everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.*

1 Corinthians 9:25

In his previous verse, Paul wrote that there are many runners in a race, but only one would receive the crown. He then implored those in Corinth to run their course in Christ in the same manner, setting aside all encumbrances and looking towards the Prize. Now, still using the Isthmian games as his metaphor, he tells them that "everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things."

Ancient writers note that those who were involved in the preparation for these games required ten full months of training, right up to the moment before the games began. Much of their training involved not only physical conditioning, but dietary restrictions as well. The thoughts of two commentators from those times read:

Epictetus - "Thou must be orderly, living on spare food; abstain from confections; make a point of exercising at the appointed time, in heat and in cold; nor drink cold water nor wine at hazard."

Horace - "The youth who would win in the race hath borne and done much; he hath sweat and been cold; he hath abstained from love and wine"

Such extreme conditioning would have been known to the people at Corinth and so Paul, without extra comment, states this in the plain form that the athlete was

"temperate in all things." In this simple expression, he was intimating to those at Corinth (and thus to us) that we have an obligation to be temperate as well. We cannot expect to live an antinomian existence and feel that we are properly conditioning ourselves as we strive towards the Prize. Freedom in Christ is not freedom *to* sin. Rather it is freedom *from* sin.

Paul continues with his thought, noting that those who participated in these games conditioned themselves in this manner in order "to obtain a perishable crown, be we *for* an imperishable *crown*." Think of the difference! The athlete in these ancient games was striving for temporary notoriety and a crown that would literally fall apart in a very short amount of time. The leaves would fall off, the twigs would become brittle and eventually break, insects could destroy it in a few hours, or any thief could carry it off and it would be gone. It was a temporary reminder of a temporary honor. All of that intense conditioning for something so ephemeral in nature.

On the other hand, the crown that we are striving for is an eternal one. It will never fade, never be taken away, and never lose its luster. Paul asks us to consider this and to determine that we will strive even more rigorously for our crown than those of the Isthmian games strived, simply because our reward is so much greater; infinitely greater because it is eternal.

Life application: In this verse and the preceding verse he has made some notable contrasts that we should remember. The first is that of the earthly race which was in hopes of earthly results in contrast to the spiritual race which is in hopes of spiritual results. The second is that there was only one crown given in the earthly competition in contrast to the idea that all can obtain the crown in the spiritual race. And the third is that the crown in the earthly race is temporary and corruptible in contrast to the heavenly crown which is incorruptible and eternal. In all ways, the end result of the spiritual race is superior. Because of this, our conditioning in this race should also be superior in all ways.

Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as *one who* beats the air. 1 Corinthians 9:26

In this verse, Paul sums up his thought concerning running which he has referred to for the past two verses by saying "therefore." Because of what he stated, his concluding thought is that "I run thus: not with uncertainty." In his run towards the Prize, he had a positive end and goal. The word he uses for "uncertainty" is *adēlōs*, a word used only here in the New Testament. It means something out of sight or obscure. For Paul, there was nothing obscure about his goal. He had a marked determination which led directly to Christ. The author of Hebrews says it this way -

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith..." Hebrews 12:1, 2

There was nothing that would hinder his race to the finish line, and to him that finish line was never out of his sight. After having conveyed this thought, he then suddenly switches from running to another metaphor, boxing. Not only was his race unhindered and with an end that was perfectly evident, but his attitude in reaching that point was also comparable to the boxer. Again in this one verse he uses another word found only here in the New Testament, *pykteuō*. It specifically refers to a boxer; one who uses his fists in a match.

As he ran; so he fought. In his battle, he was one who fought "not as *one who* beats the air." Before boxing matches then, and still in boxing matches today, boxers will punch the air in front of them as they warm up. It loosens the muscles and it gives an advanced demonstration of the fight ahead. When they do this, they don't arbitrarily let their arms flail about. Rather, they are focused and punch as if there was already a face being hit. They also remain focused as if punches were expected to come back at them.

Once the fight actually began, they would use this same marked determination to ensure that every punch landed on its intended target. If the target is missed, it becomes too late to control the arm and additional energy is lost as the body moves with the arms. The boxer becomes unbalanced and susceptible to a good

pounding from his opponent. Additionally, the tendons and muscles can be more easily strained during such a miss. For this reason, "beating the air" rather than the body of the opponent was a big mistake, a mistake which could end in defeat.

Paul determined that any attack by Satan would be deflected and that his prowess as a fighter was to fight back with exacting blows, not just in defense, but in an offensive manner. He prepared himself for the battle and he always determined to be ready and on target with his actions.

Life application: Paul likens our time in Christ to a race and also to a boxing match. Both of these are extremely strenuous activities and the implication is that we need to be prepared both mentally and physically in order to meet the challenges we will face. The surest way to be ready is through three distinct avenues - 1) prayer; 2) fellowship with other Christians; and 3) reading, studying, and adhering to the word of God. If we do these, we will be like Paul as we strive forward. We will be prepared for the race and for the battle.

But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. 1 Corinthians 9:27

To finish chapter 9, Paul shows the severity of the conditioning he placed upon himself in order to obtain his crown. He had just said that he fought, not as one who "beats the air." Using a boxing metaphor, he showed that like a boxer, he made every "punch" count in his training and in his fight to share the gospel. Now he continues on with the boxing metaphor. The word translated as "discipline" is the Greek word *hupópiázó*. It means to "strike under the eye" and thus to bruise, like a black eye. It is from the Greek word *hupópiōn* which is the part of the face under the eyes. It's used only one other time in Scripture, in Luke 18:5. There it is speaking of the widow who troubles the judge as she continuously comes before him seeking justice.

Paul strove in the same manner as she did, continuously bringing his body "into subjection." Here he uses an interesting term, *doulagōgō*. It means to bring into

captivity or slavery as one would do when leading the losers of a battle off the battlefield. In this then, Paul is saying that his mortal flesh was the continuous loser in his battle. It was the flesh against the Spirit and the Spirit in him was always the victor. All of the worldly lusts and temptations were brought into this state of captivity, as he says, "lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."

Here he was telling others to remain pure and undefiled in their walk. It would be hypocritical to act differently than how he preached. What a sad thing to stand at the judgment seat of Christ next to those he had preached to and have them receive greater rewards than he because of failing to bring his passions into subjugation! In order to avoid this, he lived as he preached. The term he uses for "disqualified" is *adokimos*. It comes from the idea of "bad metals." It indicates the metals that are put into the fire and fail the test for purity. They are scraped off and removed; they are worthless slag and thus are cast away.

Paul was determined to be pure and undefiled when he stood before the Lord and so he disciplined himself in a way that this would come about.

Life application: Paul's words here at the end of chapter 9 show that he struggled with the flesh like anyone else. If he had to discipline himself against it, it is an indication that discipline was needed. If we have a problem with weight, we won't lose the weight without working out our diet. If we have a problem with an addiction, it won't solve itself. Instead it will need to be brought under control. This is the way it is for all things contrary to the word of God. We can either slip comfortably into rebellion or we can fight against it. Let us be found approved by adhering to the word and standing fast in the battle which rages within us!

Lord, the flesh certainly does put up a fight

I cannot deny that it wages war against me

I struggle back at each punch and bite

And focus my eyes so that You are all I see

*Lord, help me in this raging battle
Keep me close to You and obedient to Your word
As the snake hisses and his tail does rattle
Be with me and protect me, this I pray my Lord*

*You went to the cross to win the war for us
And so I know that You will be with me, my precious Lord Jesus*

Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 1 Corinthians 10:1

In beginning of chapter 10, Paul will refer back to the issue of chapter 8, food sacrificed to idols. However, he is also building upon the thought which he has been discussing at the end of chapter 9, that of striving for a crown and the conditioning that it required. And so he begins with "moreover."

Many translators state "but" or "for" rather than "moreover" to either show a contrast to his previous words or a continuation of the argument rather than a new direction. Whichever is intended, he is addressing "brethren." The words are given to believers in the church for their edification and growth. To these brethren, he gives a phrase which is intended to open their minds to a passage of Scripture in a new way. He says, "I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea."

As he continues, it will become apparent that they are already aware of the exodus story. What Paul is making known to them is that there is a spiritual application to the story which is applicable to them (and thus to us) as believers. He will repeat the word "all" five times in the first four verses to highlight that what occurred included the entire body involved in the exodus. Despite that however, it wasn't received by all in the same way.

It then is a spiritual warning and admonition that will apply to those in the church. Yes, all were "under the cloud." This was the sign of God's divine protection for the Israelites. The terminology was used, for example, by David in the 105th Psalm -

"He spread a cloud for a covering,
And fire to give light in the night." Psalm 105:39

That "all passed through the sea" means that the entire body of Israel, along with the mixed multitude who went with them, marched through the waters of the Red Sea and to freedom from the bondage and oppression of Egypt.

Life application: Paul shows us that the stories found in the Old Testament have been given for our instruction. In all, they will always point us to a stronger relationship with Christ if we will use them as they are intended. Not only that, there are spiritual applications and pictures of future redemptive history which can be gleaned from these stories. As you read the Old Testament, always ask yourself, "How does this point to Christ Jesus?" In doing this, you will be pursuing Scripture as it was intended to be viewed.

...all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 1 Corinthians 10:2

Paul, telling his readers at Corinth "that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea," now further explains this. In this exodus from Egypt which took place under the conditions he mentioned "all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea." In other words, what they did is to be symbolically equated to what we have now done in Christ. The Israelites willingly followed Moses thus accepting him as their spiritual leader. They subjected themselves to the laws and ordinances that he gave to them and thus they were symbolically "baptized" as they were under the cloud and passing through the sea.

The same preposition which is used for baptism in Matthew 28:19 is used by Paul here. In this, we can see that those who are baptized into Christ are acknowledging an acceptance of His spiritual leadership and the laws and ordinances which He prescribes for us. The Old Testament is given in shadows and pictures of a greater reality found in Christ. God used little Israel for these pictures. We are brought out of Egypt (bondage to sin) through the work of Christ. We are baptized into this work, meaning His fulfilling the Law of Moses, and into His death and resurrection. Thus we are acknowledging His authority over us.

Paul will continue with his thoughts and then show that the external rites must be accompanied by a change in our hearts and lives.

Life application: The wondrous stories of the Old Testament are all given for a purpose. When we read them, our eyes should be open to their true fulfillment in Christ. Paul uses several examples, such as the exodus from Egypt, to show us that this is the case. Therefore, always consider this and ask the Bible questions about the meaning of passages as you read them. It will answer back with beauty and treasure.

Baptism without any change in one's heart

Has no significance, no meaning at all

It should indicate a changed life and a fresh start

And it should only come after a person on Jesus does call

Abraham first believed the promises of God

Then he was counted as righteous in God's sight

Only afterwards was he circumcised in the life he did trod

He already had shown that his heart was right

Baptism then is a sign for the believer
For the one who has first on the Lord Jesus called
Go get dunked after being a receiver
Of the Holy Spirit Who into Christ you He installed

...all ate the same spiritual food, 1 Corinthians 10:3

Not only were those brought out at the exodus "baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea," but they also "ate the same spiritual food." Again, Paul is showing that the food which sustained Israel is symbolic of the true spiritual food which we participate in when we receive the Lord's Supper.

Exodus chapter 16 shows the first details concerning the giving of the manna (manna means "what is it?"). There is even a description of it as is recorded in Exodus 16:31 -

"And the house of Israel called its name Manna. And it *was* like white coriander seed, and the taste of it *was* like wafers *made* with honey."

This "spiritual food" continued to sustain them for the entire time of their wilderness wanderings. Once Israel had crossed the Jordan, we read this in Joshua 5:10-12 -

"Now the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. ¹¹ And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day. ¹² Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year."

The giving of the manna was never forgotten by the people of Israel and it is referred to at various times in both testaments of the Bible. Even the psalms, while recounting the wondrous deeds of God, remembered the manna which sustained Israel -

"Had rained down manna on them to eat,
And given them of the bread of heaven.
²⁵ Men ate angels' food;
He sent them food to the full." Psalm 78:24, 25

But, like all things of this nature, the physical reality of the manna pictured a spiritual truth. Jesus notes this in John 6:31-33 -

"Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³² Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.'" John 6:31-33

The manna only anticipated the greater and true Bread from heaven, which is the body of the Lord Jesus. This then is what is pictured in the taking of communion, or the Lord's Supper. It is a remembrance of the work of Christ, looking back on His cross until He comes again.

Life application: Taking communion at church has no meaning unless one has received Christ as Lord. Only when the heart is directed towards Christ does the meal take on any true significance. When you receive the elements, it should be done with a humble and grateful heart for the wondrous blessing of being included in the body of Christ.

Lord God, Israel had manna in the wilderness to sustain them for forty full years, but I know I have something much more wonderful. I have the true Bread of Life

which came down from heaven to grant me eternal nourishment. I thank You for the honor and the pleasure of receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and for the weekly blessing of sharing in the Lord's Supper in anticipation of the day when He returns for His people. Even so, come Lord Jesus! Amen.

...and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. 1 Corinthians 10:4

So far in just three verses, Paul has shown the great amount of spiritual connection between the exodus and wilderness wanderings and their correlation to Christ. He has shown that the cloud and the sea pictured being baptized into Moses, meaning the Law given by the Lord. He has also shown that the manna they ate was "spiritual food." Now he shows that even the water they drank was a spiritual picture of Christ because they "all drank the same spiritual drink."

One cannot live long without water. God intended this to show that just as we cannot live without water, so we cannot live without being spiritually connected to Him through Christ. We are either dead in sins and trespasses, having inherited Adam's fallen nature, or we are born again through Christ. To show us that this was pictured in the exodus account, he says, "For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ."

The people of Israel twice drank directly from water which issued from a rock. The first time was in Exodus 17:1-6 in a place called Rephidim (meaning "resting places") which was their 11th stop while traveling. The second is recorded in Numbers 20:1-11 at a place called Kadesh (meaning "holy"). This was their 33rd recorded stop. After they received the water, the places were renamed "Meribah," which means "strife" or "contention" because the people strived with the Lord over the water.

Paul says that in these places "they drank of that spiritual Rock which followed them." There is a Jewish tradition that the rock literally followed them wherever they went. This is not the intent of Paul's words. Rather, the idea of "following"

them is that wherever they were, Christ was present. They contended with the Lord, claiming that He had left them to die, but then the Lord, through Moses, showed them that He was always there, ready to provide. This is the intent of saying that the Rock "followed them."

This Rock is then said explicitly to be Christ by Paul. In other words, the natural rock is merely a metaphor which is then left completely out of the true picture. If there was one rock in Rephidim and one rock in Kadesh and both gave water, then the Rock is a picture of Christ. If this is so, then it isn't just the rock either, but the water which issued from the rock which is also the intended symbol. As it says, "they drank 'of' that spiritual Rock."

Understanding this, the rest of the Bible in both testaments uses the terms "rock" and "water" to describe the Lord. The rock is the unmovable foundation upon which our faith is grounded, such as in the parable of building one's house upon the rock in Matthew 7. The water is the water of life seen in John 4, John 7, Revelation 22, and elsewhere. The account from John 4 is both memorable and explicit -

"Jesus answered and said to her, 'Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again,¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.'" John 4:13, 14

Life application: When reading the Bible, one should attempt to remember things that are mentioned and see if later comparisons are made. Rocks, water, harvesters, the wind, trees, numbers, milk, types of grain, different types of work, and on and on. All of them having meaning and nothing is arbitrary. Each will give us insights into Christ, into God's plan of redemptive history, and teach us moral lessons as well. Nothing is superfluous and nothing is left out. The Bible is an amazingly beautiful compilation of words which all form to show us God's love for us. And it is all centered on the Person and work of Jesus Christ.