



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 9:24–27

“Winning the Prize”

1 Corinthians

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] We thank Thee for the great plan of salvation wrought out in eternity by the wisdom of our triune God. We thank Thee for the Father who elected, for the Son who made the atoning sacrifice, and for the spirit who has applied the redemption. And we thank Thee for the certainty of the fulfillment of the purposes, all of those purposes. We know, Lord, that the elect shall ultimately reach Thy presence to the praise of the glory of Thy grace. And we know that the other purposes, which Thou hast for this creation of Thine, may be realized in accordance with Thy will.

We thank Thee for the inspired Word of God given to us to give us direction, to give us guidance, to give us comfort as we make our way along the road that Thou hast called each one of us to walk. We thank Thee for the companionship of the Holy Spirit, and we ask, Lord, that we may be submissive to him, that we may not demand our rights in our relationship with our fellow believers and with others. Enable us to know the significance in the fruit of true self-control as the apostle exhorts us and has illustrated for us in his life. Enable us by Thy grace to be pleasing to Thee.

We thank Thee for this evening. We thank Thee for the Word of God. We thank Thee for those who have come. We pray for them and for their families, for their needs, and for their concerns. And we pray for those who are unable to be here for various reasons. We pray particularly for the ill and for those who are undergoing some severe trials. We pray, Lord, that Thy presence may be with them to encourage them, to give them support, and comfort as well. We ask now as we

study the Scriptures that each of us may learn in such a way that our lives are improved spiritually by the study of the Scriptures. We commit the hour to Thee, and we commit each one of us to Thee and pray Thy blessing upon us.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Well, tonight we are turning to 1 Corinthians chapter 9 in verse 24 through verse 27, and our subject is “Winning the Prize” because the apostle does talk about a prize. Not only here but in one other place in his epistles and evidently he thought it was supremely important.

Let me read these verses, verse 24 through verse 27 of 1 Corinthians chapter 9. “Do you not know?” Have you noticed how often the apostle in this epistle has used that clause, “Do you not know”? Evidently, he thought that they had been instructed in the Word of God. So that they ideally should have known this, and he reminds them of it in the sixth chapter and here. So that you get some sense of the flavor of the apostle's mind as he thought about what they had come to understand since he had been the evangelist in their midst in the city of Corinth.

“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. 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.) Therefore I run thus, not with uncertainty; Thus I fight not as one who beats the air. But I disciplined my body and bring it into subjection lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”

I am reading from the New King James Version. This is their translation.

All of us who have any contact with Christianity in a serious way who are Christians or have heard the ministry of the Word of God in a Bible-believing environment know that salvation from sin is grounded in the principle of grace. It is as clear as the River of Water of Life in the heavenly Jerusalem which John describes in his vision as being clear as crystal. There is no doubt, if one reads

the Bible that salvation is by the principle of divine grace. We all have learned, we know those favorite texts in Ephesians 2, verse 8 and verse 9. “For by grace are we saved through faith, that not of ourselves it is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast.” Salvation is by grace. The apostle named Titus chapter 3 in verse 7 speaks about justification, and he describes justification, that is the declaration that believers are righteous before God, as being by grace.

In Titus chapter 3 in verse 7, the apostle writes these words, “That having been justified by his grace, we should become heirs according the hope of eternal life.” Eternal life is a gift. It is through grace. As the apostle says, “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” So that’s settled, at least it’s settled for believing students of the Word of God, that salvation is by grace. It’s always astonishing to us when others erect religious systems and ground so-called churches on principles that are different. That is, principles of salvation by works when the Scriptures seem so plain to us that salvation is by the principle, through the principle of grace, through the means of faith by which we receive it.

Now, all of that, I’m sure, in Believers Chapel is granted. We know that that is what the Scriptures teach and probably all, if not almost all, in this audience would readily agree with just what I’ve said. Yet it’s possible for a believer to miss the best, the Bible also tells us, by loss of rewards. In fact, in this very epistle we’ve had an indication of that because the apostle in chapter 3 when he was talking about the service of believers says in verse 15, “If anyone’s work burned, he will suffer loss. But he himself will be saved yet so as through fire.”

Now, the Bible also speaks, we know if we read the Bible much at all, of rewards. For example in 2 Peter chapter 1 in verse 11, we read these words, the apostle writes, “For so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly unto the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” An abundant entrance, not simply an entrance, but an abundant entrance.

In 2 John in verse 8 the Apostle John writes something that pertains to this as well. He says, “Wherefore we ought to receive such that we may become fellow partakers of the truth.” Well, I read

3 John, instead of 2 John. And in 2 John which I should have read, we read in verse 8, “Look to yourselves that we do not lose those things we worked for but that we may receive a full reward.”

We also have in Revelation chapter 3 in verse 1 a suggestion of the same thing, that there is a reward that is held out for faithful Christians. “Behold I am coming quickly the Lord Jesus said to the church at Philadelphia, hold fast what you have that no one may take your crown.” So we affirm that salvation is through grace. It’s found—we haven’t discussed this but I think all of you would agree with this, it is grounded in the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ who shed his blood for sinners and accomplished the atoning sacrifice by which we are saved. But now also there is such a thing as reward. There are some believers, evidently, who will receive an abundant reward and others who will not. There is a difference among believers. And that, it seems to me, the point of Paul’s words in our passage that we are looking at. It’s possible for a believer to miss the best by loss of rewards. The context of this passage is the background for the reference here to the race and the hope that one will come to the end and receive a reward. We’ve been talking about it for a good bit now because in chapter 9 we’ve—chapter 8 and chapter 9, which have to do with meat sacrificed to idols. We’ve talked about this a pretty good bit, and it is going to be picked up again in more detail further detail in chapter 10. So from chapter 8 through chapter 10, we have the discussion of the question of eating meat sacrificed to idols and the issues that that question raised.

Now, in chapter 8 the apostle had pointed out it is true that so far as believers are concerned they know that if they eat meat sacrificed to idols that they are not eating meats that are sacrificed truly to idol spirits. There are no such divine spirits, Paul says. There is only one God and so, consequently, as far as believers are concerned, he says, they have freedom. If they have knowledge, they have freedom. But unfortunately there were many who did not have knowledge. And so the apostle, because he is convinced that if a person goes contrary to his conscience even though he may not really be breaking a statement in the Word of God, it is sin for him to live or act contrary to what he thinks is right.

In another epistle he says, “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” And so we pointed out that if a person who is a weak Christian—those are Paul’s terms—weak in conscience if he is thinking that it’s wrong to eat meat sacrificed to idols nevertheless eats them, he violating his conscience and sinning. And so, consequently, for believers who are strong, who have knowledge that there is no God behind the meat sacrificed to idols and feels free to eat such meat, even though it were offered to idols, even though idols don’t exist, being strong they should not act in such a way as to wound the conscience of those who are weak. Now, that’s the background.

The apostle in chapter 9 is trying to illustrate the fact that that involves a sacrifice because it means that a person who has knowledge, must not—if he is in danger of wounding the conscience of one of the weak, he must not exercise his knowledge; that is, his right to eat for the sake of his brother. He must sacrifice, in other words. If I think, for example, that you believe that eating meat sacrificed to idols is wrong, I know of course I can eat that meat, but for your sake, because of love of the brethren and desire to prevent them from wounding their conscience, I am, as Paul says, urged to sacrifice and not eat such meat sacrificed to idols. So that’s the background.

Now, Paul says to illustrate the point, let me ask you to think about the fact that ministers of the gospel, apostles—he’s talking about himself as an apostle—but others who minister the Word of God have the right to be supported by those who hear the Word of God. So in chapter 9 that the apostle went into great detail, gave more than one argument to support the idea that if a person goes out preaching the Word of God at the beck and call of God and through the spirit ministers the Word, then he has a right to share in the physical properties of those who hear the Word and respond to it.

Now, he said however, I have not exercised my right. This is his sacrifice. I have not exercised my right. In fact, I have ministered the Word of God and made it free of charge. I’ve not asked for money. I have not sent out any prayer letters. I have not told you about what I’m doing and therefore support what I am doing. And because my expenses are so great, and because I have an office sending out literature all the time, and he didn’t ask also for them to purchase any of his

tapes or videos or any of that. He gave himself to the work of the Lord to make the gospel free of charge.

Now I feel that that's a very significant principle. I think that that is very important, because it lets me know that the apostle does not have any desire for the dollars in my pocket. But I have serious questions about many others today who write me letters constantly. I get—as you do I'm sure if you've ever given any money—I gave money once to one ministry and I receive something from them every week. I have thought that perhaps I ought to keep it, so I would be able to have the statistics absolutely correct. I may be wrong, maybe they missed a week or two or there. I also get telephone calls from them, too. Not one or two. They even call Martha. So that does not comport with apostolic principle. Paul said he gave himself wholly to the ministry, made the gospel free of charge because he was not like the other apostles. The other apostles were volunteers. After all, Jesus said follow me. Matthew could have said he was not going to follow him. When he saw him at the receipt of custom, he said follow me. Matthew left and followed him.

Now, we know if we know all of theology that there is something about the ministry of the Holy Spirit that moved in Matthew's heart that caused him to come, but he came freely. In the case of the apostle, he said, I did not come freely. I was apprehended on the Damascus Road. I was forced into the ministry. I was a servant of the Lord and brought as an apostle in that way and therefore to receive a reward I have felt I have been led to therefore give the gospel out without charge.

Now, Peter. Peter could travel around with his wife. He did. Paul makes reference to it. The first Pope had a wife. Later Popes, they don't like having wives, but Peter had a wife and evidently it was possible for them to be supported too, because they supported Peter, and they also supported his wife. That seems to be the flavor of the passage. I can't prove that absolutely, but Paul talks about having the right to lead around a wife and that seems to suggest that. Most of the commentators feel that that's probably the case. So in the case of the other apostles they freely came, but they could have turned aside. Paul feels in his case, no, it was different. He says, as he goes on to say down here,

“For if I do this willingly I have a reward, but if against my will I’ve been entrusted with a stewardship.” And that’s what he feels. He’s been entrusted with a stewardship. “What is my reward then that when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.”

Now, we talked about that. And now the apostle here is going to underline the fact that the kind of Christian life that we live is a life that involves struggle. A kind of struggle that an athlete has when he seeks by the kind of training that is necessary to truly win a race like an Olympic race. In the Christian life, it is similar. It is necessary to exercise self-control. It is necessary to work. It is necessary to struggle. It is necessary to give yourself whole-heartedly to the Christian faith.

Now, he’s not talking just about apostles. He’s talking about everybody when he talks here in these verses. He’s talking about you; he’s talking about me, that the Christian life is a life in which we are all involved in a race. The end of the race is death. That’s the end of the race. It would be nice to know that the end of the race was July the 1st or something like that. But it’s not so. The end of the race is the end of our life. We are in it until the end. And standing on our rights is foreboded because Paul doesn’t stand on his rights, speaks of himself as sacrificing with that goal in mind.

You look at the Bible, and you’ll see some illustrations in the Word of God of the kind of people that Paul is talking about. There was Lot, for example. Now, Lot, if you read the text of Holy Scripture you might wonder if he was really a Christian man. In Genesis chapter 19 we read these words about Lot, verse 33 through verse 38. It is a very sorted story, the end of his life, near the end of his life. “So they made their,” verse 33 of chapter 19 of Genesis,

“So they made their father drink wine that night. And the firstborn went in and lay with her father, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. It happened on the next day that the firstborn said to the younger, ‘Indeed I lay with my father last night; let us make him drink wine tonight also, and you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve the lineage of our father.’ Then

they made their father drink wine that night, also. And the younger arose and lay with him, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose.”

This drunken man engaging in the worst kind of immorality, the kind of thing that the apostle has talked about in chapter 5 of this very epistle, sexual intercourse in the family—how horrible. Now, you might think from that that Lot doesn't really measure up to a Christian at all, but in the New Testament in 2 Peter chapter 2 in verse 8, we read this about Lot, verse 7, “And delivered righteous Lot”—righteous Lot, righteous Lot, “And delivered righteous Lot who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked.” This man living in that city was oppressed by the unrighteous conduct of the people there. “For that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds.” And yet he's the man who is guilty of that kind of sin. Now, he is righteous. Evidently he has measured up to the Old Testament justification by faith, and he belongs in the family of God. But it's evident that, so far as his life is concerned, it is quite a bit different from the lives of some of the other of the Old Testament saints.

Demas in the New Testament. Demas in 2 Timothy chapter 4 in verse 10. We read this concerning him, the apostle says,

“For Demas has forsaken me, having loved the present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia.”

What a heritage to leave in the Word of God. Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, loving this present world. The Scriptures say the man who loves the world does not love God. But so far as Demas is concerned, we know that Demas was a believer. As a matter of fact, Demas is not only a believer, but Demas is one who is a fellow prisoner. Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus—I mean a fellow laborer, as do Mark, Aristarcos, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers.” So Demas is a believing man, but Demas in abandoning the Apostle Paul, think of that—

abandoning the Apostle Paul. Abandoning S. Lewis Johnson Jr., well, there's no particular sin in doing that unless it's some scriptural principle that we both hold. But this man left the Apostle Paul, because he loved this present world. What a heritage to leave in the Word of God, a Demas kind of person.

We have lots of worldliness in the church today. That's one of the things that's troubling evangelicalism. There's no question about it. Today if we look at evangelicalism as over against a few years back, say forty or fifty, we have an entirely different kind of church member today in evangelicalism. One, he may not have some things that modern Christians have, but there is one thing that he had that we don't have very widely, and that is an unworldly attitude toward our Lord in the ministry of the gospel.

So the apostle now is going to talk about what we ought to do in order to win that reward. And he says in verse 24, “Do you not know that they who run in a race, all run but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.”

Now, Paul was a man who, I'm going to suggest this, I cannot prove it. Paul was a man who was well-acquainted with the sports world of his day. In fact, we could take out five minutes and cite passage after passage in the Pauline epistle in which he uses the figures of running, of fighting, as well as these here before us and other things striving, things that have to do with the sports world. No doubt he was well aware with what was happening in the world of his day. And he obviously was well-acquainted with Isthmian games which took place right near Corinth. In fact, they were associated with Corinth. And those Isthmian games—that's hard to say, isn't it? [Laughter] The Isthmian games were something like the Olympic games. In fact, they were widely celebrated just like the Olympian Games. Every two years those games were held in a great stadium located near Corinth. Notice the things that were requirements. Now, there is some question about these requirements. In fact, just yesterday I read a few of the dictionaries that have to do with this and there is general agreement that there is some question about the details. But some of these things are undoubtedly true. And at least one person has said all of these are true. Only freeborn men could

enter the games. These must engage in ten months' preparation as training. They must be able to certify their faithfulness in training. They must keep morally clean preceding each contest.

The contestants were led about the arena by a herald or a master of ceremonies while he shouted out in a loud voice to all the spectators if they could accuse the consultants of any crime or any wickedness, depravity. For thirty days before the contests, a rigid period of preparation was observed, and each contestant was announced by his name and his country. In the case of the victor, he was crowned. This is so interesting. In the earlier days, he was crowned with a garland of parsley. What a prize? A garland of parsley. That was changed later on to a pine wreath. And that's what they sought to win. It meant so much to them. But when they won those athletes were famous in their own cities. They went home with great pomp and ceremony. In fact, a breach was often made in the walls of their cities to allow them to enter and the athlete was immortalized in poetry and verse.

So when Paul talks about the race, you can see this was something that everyone would have understood. And they would have thought in Corinth at least of the games that took place near them. “Do you not know that those who run in the race all are participants but one receives the prize?” In other words, the crown is not an award of salvation, but it is a reward for service. It is a prize. In fact, the very term that Paul uses here is the term he uses in Philippians chapter 3 when he talks about pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. So verse 24 then is the illustration, “Don't you know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize. Run in such a way that you may obtain it.”

Now, the application follows in verse 25. And the application is treated negatively as well as positively, or at least there is a comparison and that there is a contrast. That'd be better I think. Now, the comparison is made in verse 25 in the first clause. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. That's the word that means self-control. In fact, the root of that is found in Galatians chapter 5 is one of the fruits—oh, wait a minute. There's only one fruit, isn't there? The fruit, singular, of the Spirit is nine virtues but one fruit. If we have eight of those virtues and we don't

have the ninth, we don't have the fruit of the Spirit. We have some virtues but not the fruit. It's a ninefold unity, the fruit of the Spirit. And one of the virtues is self-control.

Now, you look at the athletic world of our day, and you'll find lots of evidences of self-control. Anyone who is interested in any athletic endeavor can point out to someone who has worked harder than others and has succeeded largely because they have worked harder than others. I remember in golf, Ben Hogan—you couldn't count the number of practice balls that Ben Hogan hit in the earlier days of his life and became such a machine as he became. Or looking at the affairs of our armies and look at the army with Washington at Valley Forge and see the things that those men suffered. Or the armies of the North and the armies of the South in the Civil War and what they suffered in order to win. In the Bible, we have Gideon and the Midianites and the things that Gideon and his men had to do in self-control in order to win that battle, could not have won it aside from the self-control and the surprise and the council of the Lord God. What a difference that makes.

We have it illustrated all the time. Why do the Dallas Cowboys—why do they practice preseason in Austin rather than Thousand Oaks, California? It's more comfortable in California. It's cool at night. In the day they don't perspire as much. I'm not trying to blow Jimmy Johnson's horn, but one thing he said was, he was going to bring them back to Texas and have them practice in the heat of Texas because it would be evidenced later on in the games that counted that that training was helpful. Well, he has the last word, as far as I'm concerned. Evidently the things that they suffer down in Austin stood them in good stead, not only in the opening games of the season when it's hot and the Yankees come down here and don't understand what good weather is, particularly out on the Cotton Bowl floor when it's maybe a 120 and they are playing out there. But even at the end of the season, it's the Cowboys who have the stronger team physically. Self-control.

We've seen in recent days the greatest example of this in D-Day. To see what our men did when they went over. The training took here, the training they took for a year in Britain, and then what they did in battle largely associated to the self-control that was required of these young men, and the older men as well, in order to win that significant battle that you and I can sit in an

auditorium like this and feel relatively safe because of what those great men have accomplished at the loss of their lives for you and for me.

So Paul says, “Everyone who runs competes for the prize, exercises self-control in all things.” Now, in tremendous contrast, he says they do it in order to win a corruptible crown, a pine wreath, a parsley wreath at one time. But in our case, it’s different. He says now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. I’m going to have to, for the sake of time, now turn to a number of places in the Bible, but there are some that come immediately to mind. For example, in 1 Peter chapter 5, when Peter is talking about the elders and he talks about how it’s necessary for these elders to exercise their ministry in a faithful way. In verse 4, 1 Peter 5 he says, “And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” A crown—a special crown for church elders.

The apostle himself near the end of his life when he was writing to Timothy in 2 Timothy chapter 4 in verse 7 and verse 8 says, “I fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Finally there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day. And not to me only but also to all who have loved his appearing.” Do you love his appearing? Do you love the thought of the coming of our Lord? Is it a hope that really motivates you? Is it really something you love? He says love not like, love his appearing. They receive the crown, too.

The Bible speaks of the crown of life in various other ways to illustrate the fact that there are certain things that are given in grace to faithful Christians. I’m sure that every one of those believing people from the beginning of time would hasten to object, I didn’t earn it. It was given by the grace of God. I didn’t deserve it. It was done in grace. But the Bible does speak of them as rewards, crowns.

Now, Paul’s argument concludes in verse 26 and verse 27. Therefore—now this is for those Corinthians who are not willing to bypass eating meats sacrificed to idols because they have knowledge, and they are not willing to sacrifice for the other believers who are weak believers. So

Paul is illustrating by his own attitude, “Therefore I run thus.” The apostle moves, you’ll notice, from the personal, from “you” verse 24, “Do you not know,” to “everyone” in verse 25 “And everyone who competes for the prize,” and then in verse 26 to “himself,” the personal application traceable to his own life, “Therefore I run thus.” This is in order to win the reward, in order to live as such a Christian that he will not be ashamed of the Lord’s coming when he comes. “Therefore I run thus.” Not with uncertainty. These are the aspects of self-discipline. So thus I fight, and notice how he fights.

Back in my earlier years, in my—it wasn’t in a previous incarnation, but it was a previous manner of life. I did not like to get into the ring. I would not have gotten in the ring, but I love to watch people who had the nerve to get in a prizefight ring. Some great fighters in the past, I’ve followed them down through the years and some of the men were great men. And I remember particularly in this, two fellows. One was Rocky Graziano, not Rocky Marciano, Rocky Graziano middle weight, and Tony Zale also a middle weight. Both of them won the championship. Zale won it first, as I remember. They fought three times. Zale won the first fight. They fought again, and Graziano—Graziano, who had a great punch—so did Zale, but a very wild swinger—landed one and won the second. And they had the third fight, and it also ended in a knockout with Zale winning it. The difference between the two fighters was the difference between a wild swinger who happened to connect, and a man who measured his punches very carefully and made all of them, or at least it appeared that way, made all of them count.

That’s what Paul is talking about when he says here—he’s not talking about—by the way, he’s not talking about practicing. He’s not talking about shadowboxing. I have heard some people illustrate it that way, and it’s not a bad illustration. It just isn’t true, as true to this context. This is a fight. This is a real fight that Paul is talking about. These words mean that. Thus I fight. Not as one who beats the air, not like Rocky Graziano, but like Tony Zale who made his punches count. That’s what he’s saying. I don’t fight wildly. I don’t beat the air, but I make my punches count. Careful,

careful in the ministry with the time that God has given to him. He is not an air-smiter. He plants his blow where he hopes to do it. He is not shadow boxing. He’s really fighting.

I had an illustration in my notes that I had forgotten, I read it again, of a little boy who had an older sister, and he received a bicycle. And he was trying to learn how to ride that bicycle, and so he was, as he was trying to do it, he was having difficulty. And she was about eight years of age and he was six years of age, and he was finding it very hard to make that bicycle go. He would steady himself and then he would fall or he had to put his foot down, but finally he managed to wobble from side to side, and he proudly shouted out to his sister, I’m moving, I really am moving. And she looked at him and saw him wobbling as he was wobbling, and she said, Yes, you’re moving, but you’re not going. [Laughter]

Well, Paul says that he’s fighting. He’s not doing it uncertainly. He’s planting his punches. He’s not beating the air. But he’s doing his job as it should be done. And in the 27th verse he says, “I disciplined my body and bring it into subjection.” That word discipline is interesting. It means to bruise, black and blue. That’s the expression he is using. In other words, he realizes that the body is not always subject to the Spirit. The body has the sin principle dwelling within it. Christians struggle with the body, constantly struggle with the body, always will struggle with the body as long as we are in the flesh. Read Romans 7, the apostle describes the conflict, and so he says, “I discipline my body and bring it into subjection,” bruise it black and blue. It’s figurative of course, but it’s self-discipline by eating the right kind of food, no doubt. I don’t know that he knew anything about cholesterol or fat or any of that kind of thing. As a matter of fact, he probably didn’t have to learn those things because he didn’t have enough to eat. But at any rate, he was careful, careful about his food, careful about his activities, careful about his thought so far as he possibly could.

So he disciplined his body, brought it into subjection. That’s a very interesting word, too. That means, to lead into slavery. In fact, that’s the very meaning of it. It comes from the word *{dulos}* plus the word *{argo}*, which means “to lead into slavery.” So he leads his body into slavery. What’s the purpose of it? To bring the body into subjection to the Spirit. Romans Chapter 6 makes it

very plain. He talks about being enslaved to righteousness. This is what is necessary. This is what he felt was necessary. And God also put him in experiences that made it necessary for him to do that.

The Lord, in—with his servants when we are not willing to discipline ourselves—puts us in some situations which require it. For example, Joseph. How did Joseph learn what he ultimately learned? He learned by being ultimately sent by God into bondage in Egypt. That’s what he said. He said later on, God did this. You didn’t do it. God did it. We know his brethren did it. But Joseph knew that they were just tools of the Lord God. He did it. But that was part of his training. It was part of his training so he could be the means of deliverance for Jacob and his family and of the elect people for centuries. So that’s the way he did—that’s the way he applied discipline to his servant Joseph.

Moses. Well, he brought Moses up in the court of the Egyptians so that he was wise, wiser than perhaps any man of his day. As a matter of fact, there is tradition to the effect, seems to be reliable, that Moses was a military leader while he was there in Egypt. He needed some military skills to lead that motley little company out of Egypt and on into the land and win victory for them in the name of the Lord. And so he brought Moses to the court. And then he took Moses into the desert that he might learn things there that would further perfect the character of this man as the great leader of the children of Israel to bring them into the Promised Land.

You might think that of even—of all the people who were here on the earth, there would be one person who wouldn’t need any discipline. I hate to use the word “need” because I don’t imply sin by that. But our Lord, too, was led into the wilderness and there he underwent testing, testing. It was part of his training for the messianic task. And, of course, not simply that, but that was part of his training as well. And so as the God-man, as the deliverer, as the Messiah, in all of our Lord’s activity as a man is subject to the Father. As he said, I do the things that I see my Father doing or telling me to do. So as the Messiah, he is subject to the Father. The Father is greater than I. What did he mean by that? Not that our Lord is not the divine second person of the Trinity, but he is in subjection to the Father. He doesn’t say my God; my Father is greater than I.

Now, why? Well, Paul sums it up. He says I discipline my body, bring it into subjection lest when I have preached to others—that may be an allusion to the person who shouted out in the Isthmian games. (I think I did it that time.) In those games, there was a herald who would make the announcements, and there may be an allusion to that here in which Paul says lest when I have preached to others—I have made the announcement, I preached the gospel, I have proclaimed the message—I, myself, should become disqualified.

Now, I'm sure that many of you in this audience have notes on disqualified and so you know, of course, that that word doesn't mean that one loses one's salvation. After all, everybody by Paul's illustration here, is in the race. And so the race is for those who qualify for the race. So the disqualification is disqualification for the prize. The prize that one receives. But all who are believers in Christ are in the race. But this word is a word that means literally “disapproved.” And as a matter of fact, if you look back in 1 Corinthians chapter 3 again, in chapter 3 in about verse 15, you will have a sense of the word. And also the fact that when a person enters the race, it is possible for him to lose his reward, yet himself be saved because we read here verse 14, “If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, so as through fire.” So the apostle says, “lest I myself should become disqualified.” That is, not able to win the prize. This word incidentally was used of broken pottery which was on a shelf. In other words, it was not that a person was a castaway in the sense of losing salvation, but cracked, not the kind of pottery that you would want to use.

H. A. Ironside has an interesting illustration in his book which I have used in years past. Those of you who know anything about sports will remember from references here and there, even today occasionally, Jim Thorpe, the Indian, the Indian who won medals at the Stockholm Olympics in the earlier part of the 20th century. He was a great athlete. He went over there, won such events that finally when he was awarded his medal, the King of Sweden, because they were held on Stockholm, the King of Sweden said to him, you, sir, are the greatest amateur athlete in the world. Now, Dr. Ironside worked among the Indians for many years. And he said he happened to be among

the Indians at this time. And he went into the trading store, and he said the Indians were around, and they had a newspaper. His own interpreter, Ironside's interpreter in his preaching to them, was reading the paper for a group of Indians who were around, and he was reading of the exploits of James Thorpe. This Indian athlete who had gone to the Olympics and had beaten all of the white athletes, and the Indians were rejoicing in it.

He said he was in the trading store a few weeks later, and he knew that something was wrong, that the Indians were murmuring, he used the term that they were grunting and scowling. And his interpreter again was reading the newspaper, and it was a story of how Jim Thorpe was accused of being unprofessional. It turns out that earlier in his life he had played baseball in Pennsylvania, I believe, because he went to Carlisle College or University there and had played baseball and he had been paid five dollars a week for playing amateur baseball. He thought it was amateur baseball. And so the king demanded after it had been proved that Jimmy Thorpe had no right to participate in the games, the king asked him to send his medals back. And he sent all the medals back, of course, it nearly broke his heart and the other Indians were very upset over it.

And he wrote to the king and he said, and these were his words, “I hope your majesty will not think too hard of me, please remember that I did not know that taking five dollars a week for playing ball on the village baseball team made me a professional. I never meant to deceive.”

The sequel to it is that the man to whom the medals were then awarded sent the medals back to Jim Thorpe and said to him, “I won't keep them. You did better than I, and you deserve them.”

Ironside used it as an illustration of the fact that Thorpe did his work well, but he had not observed the rules and consequently he had not received what should have been his in the beginning.

So Paul says “Lest I myself should become a cast away.” We are too inclined to think in Believers Chapel it could not happen to me. It could not happen to us. My Christian friends, the fact that it is in the Bible means it can happen to me. It can happen to you. It is possible for us who are Christians, who are believers to lose the rewards.

Now, next week we'll see the shining example of it. And Paul will talk about that. But don't think for once that we have such privileges that we are not able to fail in the Christian life and become a castaway, disqualified. It is possible. It is possible for you. It's possible for me. It's possible for our elders. It's possible for Believers Chapel. It's possible for all of us. We are humans. We have the sin principle dwelling within us. Oh, how we ought to give ourselves whole-heartedly to seek to win our reward and to be delivered from the failure, becoming a castaway. As Paul says, “I run so not uncertainly. I fight, not as one who beats the air, I bruise my body, make it black and blue. I bring it into subjection I lead it into slavery lest having preached to others I should become a castaway.” Listen to what the apostle will say in the next chapter. But with many of them, God was not well-pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Now, all these things happened under them for examples and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come.

“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall. I speak as to wise men, judge ye, what I say, lust, murmuring, all of the kinds of sins that carried out in Israel in those days are possible for us as well.”

And I want you to notice one other thing that service does not supersede self-discipline. In other words, if we serve more, that doesn't mean that we are not required to exercise discipline and that we might not fail. The apostle had preached, preached marvelously, had served in a remarkable way. But Paul says even he was in danger. So may we not have to confess failure? Paul said—Saul said—at the end of his life, I played the fool. May God in his grace enable us to say with Paul, I fought a good fight. I finished my course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth, the crown of righteousness is laid up for me. Wouldn't it be marvelous if all of us in Believers Chapel might win such a crown? May God give us the desire to give ourselves more whole-heartedly to his service. Let's bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for Thy Word, and we thank Thee for the solemn counsel that is found within it for us. If Paul, the great apostle, should be concerned in such a significant way, oh how much more art we to be? Lord, give us faithfulness. Give us self-control. Give us wholehearted service. Enable us to be the kind of witness to our family, to our friends, to the people with whom we come in contact that will result in fruit for our Lord Jesus Christ. For each one in this audience, Lord, may Thy blessing rest upon us for the glory of our Savior’s name in whom we pray.
Amen.