

## “Living for God’s Approval” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

On June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1991 I watched one of the greatest displays of strength and endurance I’ve ever seen. The location: Las Vegas. The setting: Caesar’s Palace. The event: Donovan “Razor” Ruddock vs. “Iron” Mike Tyson in a scheduled twelve round championship bout. This was a much-anticipated fight because it was the rematch that followed their highly controversial bout. In their previous brawl, the referee stopped the fight because Tyson was pummeling Ruddock.

Well, in the rematch Ruddock was out to prove that he deserved another chance. Ruddock and Tyson were pretty evenly matched in the first three rounds, but in the fourth round Ruddock suffered a broken jaw. Most people expected him to favor his jaw and fight soft, but not Ruddock. He came out fighting round after round after round against, at that time, the world’s greatest fighter and most devastating puncher. He fought eight more rounds after the broken jaw and actually finished the fight stronger than he began! The fight went the scheduled twelve rounds and Tyson won by the judges’ decision.

Although Tyson won this fight, I believe the real winner was “Razor” Ruddock. Why? Because he endured to the final bell and finished well. He overcame many obstacles and saved his best fighting for the final rounds. I want to encourage you to be a Razor Ruddock. This will require enduring to the end and finishing well.

This raises the questions: “Why is endurance so important?” “Isn’t my perseverance guaranteed?” Well, if we are to take seriously the numerous warnings and exhortations that are presented in the New Testament, we had better consider the possibility that our endurance is not so certain. While our salvation is quite certain and totally secure, our success in our Christian lives and ministries is not. That’s why the Scriptures teach that *living for God’s approval requires finishing well*. I’d like to take us to Paul’s famous words in 1 Cor 9:24-27.<sup>1</sup> In this passage, Paul coaches us to run and fight for the prize.<sup>2</sup> This simple training tip will help us *live for God’s approval by finishing well*.

In 9:24, Paul tells us to run the Christian race with the intent to win the prize at the end of the race. Paul writes, **“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize?”** Paul begins with the question, “Do you not know?”<sup>3</sup> Now whenever Paul uses this question he is confident that his readers already know the answer. This passage is no exception. Paul’s audience knows that in any race there can only be one winner. Fortunately, Paul uses plural verbs and the exhortation is not “you” singular but “you” plural. Paul is saying, “*You all* run in such a way that *you all* may win.” The prize is offered to each and every believer. Unlike a foot race, we’re not competing against each other. *Every* Christian can win the prize. That’s good news because there will always be someone faster, stronger, or smarter than us. But that’s okay, because you and I are running against opportunities God gives us, not what He gives other Christians. We are competing against ourselves.

The running metaphor works like this: When a person believes in Jesus Christ he or she becomes a runner in the Christian race. So if you are a Christian, whether you like it or not, you are a runner. Paul finishes 9:24 with these words: **“Run in such a way that you may win.”** This is not an apostolic suggestion or a divine option. Instead, Paul issues a command, “Run! Don’t walk. Don’t stop. Don’t sit down. Run because you can win the prize!” After all, the point of entering the race is to win the prize. The prize does not represent salvation. Salvation is a free gift; the prize is an earned reward.<sup>4</sup> Paul is not discussing salvation in this context. He has been writing about his ministry as an apostle (9:1-23). Understood properly, then, the prize that Paul is speaking of is a reward that may or may not accompany salvation. The Christian’s prize is the honor and glory of eternal rewards. It is the joy of hearing Jesus say, “Well done!” (Matt 25:21, 23) This is the amazing grace of God. We receive salvation as a free gift and then the Lord blesses us on top of that with temporal and eternal rewards for faithfully serving Him. What a God!

So what does faithful running look like? Who are those who run in such a way that they may win?

- Christians who finish their lives still growing, still serving
- Senior saints that persist in daily prayer until the Lord calls them home
- Husbands and wives who stay faithful to each other “until death do us part”
- Young people who preserve their virginity until marriage, in spite of crushing peer pressure
- Pastors who stay passionate about ministry until their last breath
- Church members who weather the rougher patches and remain joyful, loving, and faithful

Today, you may be thinking, “I’m not running well. In fact, I’m barely in the race at all. What should I do?” The answer is: recommit to win God’s race. As long as you are in the race, run to win. Don’t just run to finish, but to win. No one just happens to make a comeback to win. Not when he is far behind. Only by believing it can happen, and with a renewed resolve to win, is a comeback accomplished. If you find yourself far behind in the race, don’t give up. Keep on running. You can still win. Don’t quit.<sup>5</sup> *Living for God’s approval requires finishing well.*

In 9:25, Paul commends the commitment of athletes who will sacrifice everything to win a temporal prize. Listen to these words, **“Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.”** The phrase translated “competes in the games” comes from the Greek word *agonizomai*. We get our word “agony” or “agonize” from it. So Paul is talking about some heavy-duty sacrificial striving here.<sup>6</sup> Verse 25 also tells us that competing for the prize requires “self-control in all things.”<sup>7</sup> What does it mean to “exercise self-control in all things?” Well, remember that Paul’s analogy is training for the Isthmian games. All of the events in these games were one-person individual sports. Hence, these athletes could not coast in their training; rather, they had to go all out! What did this require? It required many months and even years of sacrificial discipline and rigorous self-control. These athletes kept a strict diet. They made sure they got the proper amount of sleep each night. They trained daily for their particular events. They performed strength and cardiovascular exercises. They often abstained from drinking and immorality. They ate, drank, and slept succeeding in their particular event.

Why did these athletes go to such great lengths? They did it to obtain a “perishable wreath”—a paltry vegetable crown of celery.<sup>8</sup> Of course, this crown eventually withers away. It is here one day and gone the next.<sup>9</sup> Most people don’t remember who won last year’s championship. This is old news. Next season is coming up. The question becomes, “What have you done for me lately?”

Next month drive past a football field and watch the young athletes sweating under the hot sun. Clad in heavy clothes, padding, and a helmet, their faces grimace with distress and even pain. If they did this because their lives were threatened we might understand. What is difficult to grasp is that they do this voluntarily. All for a trophy that will be kept in a glass case and soon forgotten in this life and most assuredly not remembered in the next. They voluntarily wanted to play, and they will torture themselves in order to win.<sup>10</sup>

Now if athletes are willing to undergo this type of discipline and self-control, how much more so should we as servants of Jesus Christ? For unlike the athletic crown, our victor’s crown will affect us forever and ever. Paul states that our reward is “imperishable”—it is eternal! This means it does matter whether we gain or lose the prize. Hearing Jesus say “Well done!” is no small matter. Think about that for just a moment. Only what you and I do for Jesus Christ will last. And it will last and last and last. Forever is a long time. And we only have 70 or 80 years to invest in eternity. That is why I pray like Jonathan Edwards, “Lord, stamp eternity on my eyeballs!” We must run and fight for the prize, for *living for God’s approval requires finishing well.*

I realize that very few people would say self-control is one of their greatest strengths.<sup>11</sup> Yet, Paul tells us that self-control is necessary if we are to win the prize. So may I ask you: In what area(s) of your life do you need to exercise self-control?

- Do you need to exercise self-control in your media intake? Do you watch too much TV? Do you play too many video games? Do you surf the web for too many hours?
- Do you need to exercise self-control in your leisure? Do you spend too much time working out? Does your hobby come in the way of your relationship with God and your family?
- Do you need to exercise self-control in your friendships? Are your friends more important to you than your God? Are your friends keeping you from being all that God wants you to be?
- Do you need to exercise self-control over an addiction? Is food a drug to you? Are you a Christian glutton? Do you drink or smoke too much? Are you addicted to sleep? Do you need to repent for laziness? Paul says, “NO” to flabby Christianity! The Christian life demands discipline!

Now again, let me clarify that the Christian life is NOT a race to achieve entrance into heaven. We are saved by grace, not by effort or discipline or obedience or good works or anything else we do. We are saved by believing, not by achieving. We are saved *for* good works, not *by* good works. Still, the Christian life is a race, a race to accomplish what God put us here for, a race to present ourselves approved unto God, a race to finish in a way so as to hear God say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” *Living for God’s approval requires finishing well.*

In 9:26-27, Paul is going to tell us how to avoid losing in our Christian race. He puts it like this in 9:26, **“Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air.”** Verse 26 begins with the word “Therefore.” Paul often uses this word to reflect on what he has previously said. He has just stated that “the prize” lasts for eternity. Therefore, he writes that he doesn’t run aimlessly, for only those headed toward the finish line qualify for the prize. Lori and I ran cross-country in high school. We preferred to run trails instead of track. Now, imagine the following cross-country meet. The runners take their mark; the official fires the gun and the runners all head in different directions! A sun lover runs toward the west, another fond of the mountains runs toward the east, and the third heads toward the sea. This would be ludicrous. Only those headed toward the finish line qualify for the prize.

Paul also states that he isn’t a boxer who merely beats the air. Many of you know that I really enjoy boxing. The truth is I’m a pretty good boxer. I float like a butterfly and sting like a bee. However, I would make a terrible fighter. Why? Because I don’t want some bloodthirsty guy or gal pulverizing my face and doing any further damage. I prefer shadow-boxing. It is relatively harmless...until I pull a muscle. Seriously, some of us are great shadow-boxers. We make loud noises about our faith when we’re in church, but when we get out into the real world—the boxing ring—we never land a blow for Christ. In fact, many of us are so ill-prepared that we are a sitting duck for the sucker punches landed by those who deny the faith!<sup>12</sup> Yet, Paul informs us that only those who stay in the ring, duke it out, and make every blow count qualify for the crown.<sup>13</sup> Like Paul, we must be motivated by the gripping thought of standing before Jesus Christ and giving an account of our earthly lives. We must have a purpose and a goal to please the Lord. *Living for God’s approval requires finishing well.*

In *Alice in Wonderland* there is a scene where Alice asks Cheshire Cat, “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?” The cat replies, “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.” Alice says, “I don’t much care where...” and the cat replies, “Then it doesn’t matter which way you go.” Alice says that she just wants to get somewhere, and Cheshire Cat tells her, “Oh, you’re sure to do that if you only walk long enough.” We are certain to end up somewhere. The important question you must ask yourself is, “Where am I going?”<sup>14</sup>

Paul concludes this paragraph by expressing a sincere fear that he himself could fail to win the prize. Instead of running aimlessly or shadow-boxing (9:26), Paul makes this contrasting statement, **“but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached<sup>15</sup> to others, I myself will not be disqualified.”**<sup>16</sup> With the judgment seat of Christ in mind, Paul writes, “but I discipline my body and make it my slave.” The word translated “discipline”<sup>17</sup> literally means “to strike under the eye” or “to beat black and blue.” Paul beat his body into submission doing all that he could to ensure his success. He deliberately knocks himself into unconsciousness, so to speak, thus bringing his body into “slavery.”<sup>18</sup>

Most people, including many Christians, are slaves to their bodies. Their bodies tell their minds what to do. Their bodies decide when to eat, what to eat, how much to eat, when to sleep and get up, and so on. An athlete cannot allow that. He follows the training rules, not his body. He runs when he would rather be resting; he eats a balanced meal when he would rather have a chocolate sundae; he goes to bed when he would rather stay up; and he gets up early to train when he would rather stay in bed. An athlete leads his body, he does not follow it. It is his slave, not the other way around.

Many of us hate the word “discipline” as much as “self-control.” Yet, Paul says both are necessary. However, being disciplined in your Christian life doesn’t mean being straitlaced, sober, and sad. It means measuring everything you do by the goal of pleasing Christ. Discipline means asking yourself, “Is what I’m doing now going to help me win my Christian race later?” If you struggle with discipline, consider a workout routine and partner.

When I was in high school, I worked out at a gym called *Industrial Strength*. One summer, I was in the gym every morning by 5:00. I did this so that I could work out with Alex Raphael, a competitive bodybuilder. Alex was 5’9” and 200 lbs. of ripped muscle. To this day, Alex is still one of the most incredible specimens I’ve ever seen. Discipline was his middle name. During a typical workout Alex would eat several raw potatoes like I might eat a golden delicious apple. After he had finished off a couple of potatoes, he would stroll over to the nutrition bar and down a glass of raw eggs like I might a chocolate milkshake. This man was compulsively disciplined. By the way, I tried the eggs and the potatoes and I don’t recommend it. But at this time in my life I was willing to do anything short of anabolic steroids to look like Alex and to be as strong as he was. Why do I share this with you? For one reason: Whether we realize it or not, each of us needs a spiritual workout partner or coach. We need to be pushed, stretched, and held accountable. If we don’t have someone like this in our lives, we will never be all that God intended us to be.

We need a workout partner or coach so that after serving Christ we will not be dealt a black eye of disqualification. Now the question that looms before us is: What did Paul mean by the term “disqualified” (*adokimos*)?<sup>19</sup> To be “disqualified” simply means “disapproved.” It means “not standing the test.” Paul’s fear was not that he might lose his salvation, but that he may not persevere in his Christian life and ministry.<sup>20</sup> The context of this passage and the rest of Paul’s writings bear this out. In Paul’s mind there’s a difference between acceptance and approval. Acceptance is the result of a one-time act of faith. Approval is the result of ongoing faithfulness. God promises us His unconditional acceptance, but He does not promise us His unconditional approval. As a father, I will always accept my children but I may not always approve of their behavior. This is also true in our relationship with God.

As we contemplate the issue of God’s approval, we must recognize that Paul had four specific disqualifying sins in mind as he was writing these four verses. How do I know that? Notice the first word in 10:1—the word “For.” That little word “for” (*gar*) is a bridge that continues Paul’s warning. The sins that Paul identifies are idolatry (10:7), immorality (10:8), testing God (10:9), and grumbling against God (10:10). Each of these sins was enough to keep Israel from finishing their race and winning the prize. They can do the same to us today if we do not continue to seek Christ’s approval.

However, Paul's ultimate goal was the approval of Christ. As Paul's death was quickly approaching, he had these words for young Timothy: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim 4:7-8).

The phrase translated "I have fought" (*agonismai*) is one word in the Greek. Interestingly, it is a form of the same word that was used in 9:25 that was translated "competes according to the games" (*agonizomenos*). Both of these passages deal with the doctrine of eternal rewards. Another interesting tidbit is: 1 Corinthians was one of the earlier books that Paul wrote and 2 Timothy was the last. What is the point? Paul finished his course because he kept his eyes fixed on the prize. Paul realized that *living for God's approval requires finishing well*.

In the 1986 NYC Marathon, almost 20,000 runners entered this famous race. What is memorable about it is not who won, but who finished last. His name is Bob Wieland. He finished 19,413<sup>th</sup>. Dead last. Bob completed the NYC Marathon in...are you ready for this?—4 days, 2 hours, 48 minutes, and 17 seconds. Unquestionably, the slowest marathon runner in history. Ever! What makes Wieland's story so special? Bob ran with his arms. Seventeen years earlier, when he was serving as a soldier in Vietnam, Bob's legs were blown off in battle. When he runs, Wieland sits on a 15-pound saddle and covers his fists with pads. He runs with his arms. At his swiftest, Bob can run about a mile an hour, using his muscular arms to push his torso forward one step at a time. Bob Wieland finished four days after the start. What did it matter? Why bother to finish? Here's why: there is great reward in just finishing the course.<sup>21</sup>

This morning, like Ruddock and Wieland, we can finish well. If we follow the example of the Apostle Paul and countless others, we *can* finish well. Therefore, my challenge for all of us today is to *live for God's approval by finishing well*.

Copyright © 2007 Keith R. Krell. All rights reserved. All Scripture quotations, unless indicated, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1975, 1977, and 1995 by The Lockman Foundation, and are used by permission.

Permissions: Feel free to reproduce and distribute any articles written by Keith Krell, in part or in whole, in any format, provided that you do not alter the wording in any way or charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. It is our desire to spread this information, not protect or restrict it. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Keith Krell, Timeless Word Ministries, 2508 State Ave NE Olympia, WA 98506, 360-352-9044, [www.timelessword.com](http://www.timelessword.com)

**Scripture Reference**

1 Corinthians 9:24-10:13

Colossians 1:28-29

James 1:12

Hebrews 12:1-2

1 Timothy 4:11-16

2 Timothy 4:7-8

Luke 14:25-35

**Study Questions**

1. What has been the focus of my attention and efforts? On what have my eyes been focused lately (e.g., career, church, family relationships, friendships, recreation, health, school, hobbies/interests)? God loves me and accepts me because I am His child; however, this positional approval does not mean that God is pleased with my present condition or practice. What specific area(s) of my life do I believe God wants me to grow in?
2. In the next week will I become accountable to a fellow Christian? In 20 years what will you wish you had done today? Do it now!
3. Paul recognized the potential to be “disqualified” (9:27). What sin(s) am I most susceptible to succumb to (see 1 Cor 10:7-10: idolatry, ingratitude, immorality, grumbling)? How can I guard against these sins? Who will hold me accountable?
4. Please reflect on the following principles:
  - Believers will have to give an account of their lives one day (Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10).
  - Believers will be judged according to their faithfulness (Matthew 25:14-30; 2 Timothy 2:11-13).
  - No believer is above the potential for failure (Colossians 2:18; 1 Timothy 6:10-12; 1 John 2:24-28).
  - Approval requires great sacrifice and determination (Hebrews 3:12; 4:1; 10:32-39; 1 Peter 1:6-7).
  - Approval is worth the temporal sacrifice (Matthew 6:19-21; 19:27-30; 25:21; 2 Peter 1:10-11).
5. Please take the time to think through the following applications:
  - I will renew my commitment to run my race with enthusiasm and endurance.
  - I will exercise self-control in this area of my life \_\_\_\_\_.
  - I will focus my thoughts and intentions on the eternal.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Let's review the context. In chapter nine, Paul lists his rights as an apostle in 9:1-14. In 9:15-23, he then shares his decision to limit his rights for the sake of ministry. In 9:15, Paul makes it clear that he has not used any of the privileges permitted him as an apostle. Instead, he has literally bent over backwards for the sake of the Corinthian church. Paul made many tremendous sacrifices, one of them being that he took no remuneration from the people of Corinth. Although this was a great sacrifice, Paul knew he would not go unrewarded. So what did he do? He pulled out all the stops! Verses 19-23 tell us that he went to any, every, and all lengths to win more unbelievers.

<sup>2</sup> Athletic training and competition is one of the most frequent biblical analogies for Christian living (1 Cor 9:24-27; Phil 3:13-14; 1 Tim 4:7-8; 2 Tim 2:5; Heb 12:1-2).

<sup>3</sup> Gk. *ouk oidate* ("do you not know"). It is interesting that this phrase, while found ten times in this letter to the Corinthians (3:16; 5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19; 9:13, 24) is only found one other time in Paul's letters (Rom 6:16).

<sup>4</sup> The "prize" ( ) of 1 Cor 9:24 is also alluded to in 9:17-18 and constitutes a "reward" (*misthos*). In ancient Greek literature *brabeion* means "an award for exceptional performance, prize, award." See BDAG s.v. *brabeion*. The nearly identical definitions (and similar usages) seem to suggest that *stephanon* and *brabeion* are used synonymously by Paul. In this context, Paul is referring to his sacrifice for the gospel to see some saved. In the NT, *misthos* does not refer to salvation, but rather a reward that accompanies salvation. God's gift of eternal salvation is not earned, for it is "by grace...through faith" and "not of yourselves" (Eph 2:8-9). Because salvation is a gift, works have nothing to do with whether the Corinthians go to heaven or the Lake of Fire. This is clearly taught by Paul, that grace and works are mutually exclusive. "If by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work" (Rom 11:6). Again Paul says, "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt" (Rom 4:4). In Rom 4:4, Paul employs the identical word for "wages" (*misthos*) that Jesus used for "reward" in Rev 22:12. The term essentially means "payment for work done" (Matt 20:8; Luke 10:7; 1 Tim 5:18), and at times is used interchangeably with "reward" (Matt 5:12, 46; 6:1, 2, 5, 16; Rom 4:4; 1 Cor 3:8, 14; Rev 11:18; 22:12). In this particular context, the reward refers to building on the foundation of Christ with gold, silver, and precious stones (1 Cor 3:12-14). The word "reward" (*misthos*) is used in 9:17-18. It is used 28 times in the NT (15 times by Jesus). In Rev 22:12, Jesus promises "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done." The Apostle John also writes: "Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward" (2 John 8).

<sup>5</sup> Steven J. Lawson, *Men Who Win: Pursuing the Ultimate Prize* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1992), 211.

<sup>6</sup> See Paul's use of *agonizomai* in 1 Cor 9:25; Col 1:29; 4:12; 1 Tim 4:10; 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7; cf. Luke 13:24; John 18:36.

<sup>7</sup> The word *egkrateuomai* ("exercises self-control") is only used one other place in the NT. In 1 Cor 7:9, where Paul states, "But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>8</sup> It is likely that winning this crown of shrubbery resulted in fame and fortune. After the actual victory celebration at the games, great honors were heaped upon the athlete when he returned home. The "crown" was merely the symbol of victory. It faded, but the fame that followed was often more enduring.

<sup>9</sup> Throughout the NT, the word *stephanos* ("wreath, crown") is used to depict an "award or prize for exceptional service or conduct." See BDAG s.v. *stephanos* 3. The biblical writers use the noun *stephanos* of a reward that faithful believers will receive in the eternal state. The word *stephanos* also appears in Jas 1:12b: "the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." In 1 Pet 5:4: "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory." In Rev 2:10b: "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." And in Rev 3:11: "I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown."

<sup>10</sup> Erwin W. Lutzer, *Your Eternal Reward: Triumph and Tears at the Judgment Seat of Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1998), 118.

<sup>11</sup> I find it interesting that in Paul's nine-fold list of the fruit of the Spirit in Gal 5:22-23, the last characteristic he mentions is "self-control." Could it be that self-control is the most difficult fruit of the Spirit?

<sup>12</sup> Michael P. Andrus, "Spiritual Olympics" (1 Cor 9:24-27): unpublished sermon.

<sup>13</sup> There is an old saying: Champions don't become champions in the ring—they are recognized there. That's true. If you want to see where someone develops as a champion, look at his daily routine. Former heavyweight champ, Joe Frazier, states, "You can map out a fight plan or life plan. But when the action starts, you're down to your reflexes. That's where your road works shows. If you cheated that in the dark of the morning, you're getting found out now under the bright lights. Boxing is a good analogy for spiritual development because it is all about daily preparation. Training is everything! This has been adapted and revised from John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 28.

---

<sup>14</sup> Steve May, “The Search for Significance” (1 Cor 9:24-27): <http://www.preachingtoday.com/31750>.

<sup>15</sup> Mare writes, “The ancient *keryx* was the herald in the Greek games who announced the rules of the contest, but the Christian herald—i.e., preacher—not only announces the rules but ‘plays’ in the game as well. Paul had not only to preach the gospel but also to live the gospel.” Harold W. Mare, *1 Corinthians*. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976 [2001]): Electronic Ed.

<sup>16</sup> The NIV’s translation “disqualified for the prize” is a helpful *interpretation* of the context.

<sup>17</sup> The Greek verb *hupopiazo* is also translated “subdue” (NET); “punish” (NRSV); and “beat” (NIV).

<sup>18</sup> The word *doulagoeo* (“make it my slave”) is only used here in the NT.

<sup>19</sup> Three primary suggestions have been offered: (1) loss of salvation, (2) loss of ministry, or (3) loss of rewards. The first is unacceptable because it violates the clear teaching of Scriptures. The second view is a tempting one on account of its sensitivity to the context. Nevertheless, there are certain weaknesses with this view: The primary support for this third view is that 1 Cor 9:15-23 focuses on Paul’s apostolic ministry. Though this view evidences sensitivity to the broader context, it overlooks several key factors. First, the immediate context (9:24-25) indicates that Paul’s focus was not on his ministry but on some eschatological prize—a crown that will last forever. The term for “prize,” *braberion*, also has an eschatological emphasis in Phil 3:14, its only other occurrence in the NT (Peter O’Brien, *Commentary on Philippians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 432-33; and Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992], 202). Second, the inferential *toinun* (“therefore”) in 9:26 indicates that the prospect of gaining this prize, or “crown,” is what determined and motivated his behavior (9:26-27). See BDAG s.v. “*τοῖνον*”; and G. G. Findlay, *St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2 vols. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908), 2:856. So Paul feared the possible loss of this prize. F. F. Bruce, *I and II Corinthians*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 89; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 440; and Robertson and Plummer, *The First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 197. Third, the parallel between what is required to win the “crown” (9:25), namely, the exercise of self-control, and what is needed to avoid disqualification (9:27), namely, beating the body and making it a slave, suggests that disqualification concerns the “crown.” Fourth, in the close parallel of 2 Tim 4:7-8, Paul’s successful struggle in the Christian life meant he would receive “the crown of righteousness, which the Lord... will award to me on that day.” Failure on his part then would have disqualified him, not from the ministry, but from this eschatological “crown.” Therefore it seems unwarranted to view 1 Cor 9:27 as a statement concerning possible disqualification from ministry. It is more consistent with the evidence to understand it as referring to loss of an eschatological prize.

<sup>20</sup> Thiselton aptly writes, “As a metaphor it may be applied to sterile soil (Heb 6:8) or to base or impure metals or coins (Isa 1:22; Prov 25:6). However, Paul does not specify that he would be *not approved* (Grimm-Thayer’s second main possibility) as if to imply eschatological rejection or loss of salvation. The notion of *that which does not prove itself to be such as it ought* well captures the notion of purpose in relation to calling and verdict. The **test** reveals failures of an unspecified nature, not utter rejection. *Fail to qualify* (Collins) or *disqualified* (REB, NRSV, NJB) risks such an understanding, although NIV narrows the scope by continuing the metaphor, *disqualified for the prize*.” Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 716. Verbrugge writes, “Earlier, when Paul was talking about the reward of the Christian leader, he implied that there are degrees of reward in heaven (1Co 3:10-15). Even those who build with wood, hay, or straw are saved, but only as one escaping through a fire (see comments there). In spite of the severe connotations connected with *adokimos* elsewhere in Paul, it is not impossible that he may have this notion of “prize” or “reward” in mind here.” Verlyn D. Verbrugge, “1 Corinthians” in the *Revised Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, forthcoming). See also Michael Eaton, *Preaching Through the Bible: 1 Corinthians 1-9* (Kent, England, 1998), 126 and Alan F. Johnson, *1 Corinthians*. IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 151.

<sup>21</sup> Lawson, *Men Who Win*, 156.