

1 Corinthians Series #23
"Go For The Gold!" - 1 Cor. 9:19-27

I. INTRODUCTION

A. RR

B. Fame

1. Does anyone remember
 - a. Mary Meagher, Paul Anderson, James Hines, Bob Hayes
 - b. Mary Meagher won the Gold medal in the 200 M Butte 1984 - also set the record
 - c. Paul Anderson - took the Gold for the Heavyweight div in weightlifting with a lift of 500 Kg. in 1956
 - d. James Hines took the Gold in the 100 M in 1968 with a time of 9.9 sec.
 - e. Hayes took it 4 yrs. before with a time of 10.0 sec.
2. Famous in their day, but glory soon dimmed — now forgotten
3. This week, "A Salute to Michael Jordan"
 - a. Billy Crystal MC'ed
 - b. talked about how his name is everywhere
 - c. "Jordan" this and that; (shoes, vitamins, weed whacker)
 - d. he is famous - most recognizable person of our times - least in our country
 - e. you know you've arrived at fame when 3 & 4 year olds recognize you
 - f. especially popular among the youth
 - g. recent poll of teens - most popular - #1 idol
4. Just 30 years from now, those teens will mention Michael Jordan to their kids who will say, "Who?"
5. The fame and glory of this world is temporary at best
 - a. today's star is tomorrow's trivia question answer
 - b. Andy Warhol once said that because of the rise of the popular media and the hurried pace of life, everyone will be famous for 15 minutes
6. This world's fame is fleeting at best
7. Yet most people chart their lives by this world's standards and desires

C. Eternal Fame

1. In our passage today - Paul points us to a better reward, a better honor and fame
2. He calls us to leave the rat race with its empty fame to join a better race with a prize that's eternal
4. That race is serving Christ!
5. And the prize is the honor of no one less than God Himself

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 19

19 For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more;

1. Paul is still talking about balancing our rights & responsibilities: Christians
2. They had written about a dispute regarding whether or not it was all right to eat meat sacrificed to idols.
 - a. one group said it was OK because idols are really no more than hunks of wood or stone
 - b. another group said it was wrong to eat meat that had been sacrificed to an idol because it was aligning yourself with an idol to do so
 - c. quite a debate - each side declaring itself right and the other wrong
3. Paul tells those who are free to eat, not to let their liberty in Christ become a stumbling block to the conscience of those who are not free to eat.
4. His reason is that in the larger picture, my responsibility to my brother is more important than the exercise of my rights
5. In this passage he continues and expands on this . . .
6. "I am free of all men . . ."
 - a. there was one group in Corinth that was exalting itself before Christ
 - b. in fact, they were exalting it above everything else - including their responsibilities to their fellow Christians
 - c. Paul is saying to them, "By rights I too am free of all men"
 - d. but he doesn't stop there . . .
7. He says, "For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all"
 - a. he had taken his rights and submitted them to his responsibilities to serve Christ by serving others
8. Paul knew that to be the servant of Christ meant to serve others
 - a. this is how our service of God is revealed
 - b. God is in heaven, we are on earth
 - c. our service of Him is revealed on earth as we serve others
9. How was Paul's service manifested?
10. "That I might win the more."
 - a. Paul's ministry always had the goal of leading the lost to Christ and leading the saved IN Him.
 - b. his service was not aimless
 - c. it had a direction - a goal = to win people to Christ.

B. Vs. 20-23

20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those *who are* under the law under the law, that I might win those *who are* under the law;

21 to those *who are* without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but unlawful toward Christ), that I might win those *who are* without law;

22 to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all

that I might by all means save some.
23 Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with *you*.

1. People are different
2. Paul knew that if he was to reach people for Christ, he had to adapt himself to them
3. The book of Acts shows Paul in action with different people
 - a. in reaching out to the Jews, he went to the synagogue began sharing with them at the Patriarchs - their forefathers and heroes
 - b. in reaching the common gentile in Corinth or Ephesus, went to the marketplace and began with their practical needs and concerns
 - c. when he had a chance to speak to the intellectual heavyweights in Athens, he went to their philosophy school and began with the Creator God.
4. Paul had no evangelistic "formula" or program
 - a. he had no set speech or pattern that he followed slavishly
 - b. he had timeless truths to share
 - c. but he always shared them in a way people could relate to
5. There are many "packages - programs" available for the local church today to help them in their evangelistic outreach
 - a. they have slick names and enticing promotional materials
 - Pack a Pew Sunday
 - Evangelism Explosion
 - Door to Door for the Lord
 - Tickets to Heaven > The use of tracts in evangelism
 - b. it's my concern that many of these programs lose sight of the individual person who needs Christ
 - c. the danger is that people begin to try to get the lost to fit into the program's mold rather than simply bringing the love and truth of God to them as a unique person
 - d. it's my conviction that God is at work in most people's lives and that it is the Christian's role to come alongside and simply further that work by first listening to them, and then directing them to Him
 - e. the most effective evangelists are those who do this
 - who come alongside people and really care about them
 - they seek to understand them
 - then show the relevance of the Christ to them
 - that is what makes their message the gospel, the good news
 - it is the answer to a person's real need!
6. This is what Jesus did too -
 - a. to Nicodemus, a spiritually hungry teacher of the Jews Jesus spoke about spiritual re-birth: it touched Nicodemus' soul deeply
 - b. to the woman at the well, he spoke to her about true love something that had eluded her all her life.
 - c. he offered to satisfy her thirst, not with water from the well

- d. but living water from himself
 - d. whatever the need, Jesus showed how the answer would be found in Him
 - e. if he had only preached a formula - most would never have heard him or been interested.
7. If we would be effective in sharing Christ, we must follow Jesus and Paul's example

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8. Now, in v. 22, Paul makes a statement that has been badly misused . . .
- a. **"I have become all things to all men."**
 - b. have heard of people who have used this to justify sin
 - go out drinking with friends so that they can "share Christ with them"
 - they became drunk so they could witness to drunks!
 - c. not what Paul meant
 - d. he never compromised his walk with Christ.
9. Notice why he became all things to all men - **"That I might by all means save some."**
- a. Paul knew the power of his witness was directly related to his intimacy with Christ.
 - b. to compromise with sin would be to cut himself off from the power source
 - c. he would never do that
10. Look - it's clear Paul would not compromise with sin.
- a. vs. 21 - ". . . to those *who are* without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ)"

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11. Who among us wouldn't like to be a more effective witness of Christ?
12. Paul gives us a clue here how we can be -
13. We must come alongside the lost & encourage them to look to Christ.

C. Vs. 24-27

- 1. Paul now comes at all this talk about rights from another direction
- 2. Uses the illustration of an athlete
 - a. one of Paul's favorite pictures of Christian life.
 - b. also - one Corinthians would relate to
 - c. Isthmian games held there -
 - d. 2nd only to Olympic games

24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in a way that you may obtain it.

25 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.

- 3. The official training period began 10 months before games
 - a. workouts were supervised by officials

- b. athletes put under close scrutiny
rules - diet - exercise - sleep
- c. any breaking of the rules in training - disqualified
- 4. Last month before games - all come to Corinth for a final, into inspection of their lives
 - a. any breaking of training disqualified them
- 5. They subjected themselves to such rigor & self-control for the of a price only one could win & which ultimately faded
 - a. not a medal of gold as today - a crown of leaves
- green > symbol of youth & strength
 - b. put it on & parade lap - applause and adoration
 - c. a few days later, leaves have wilted
 - d. Greeks could have made a metal crown - but didn't
 - e. they wanted the winner to remember how fleeting is the youth & the fame of victory
- 6. Paul draws off this illustration for us.
 - a. they run for a passing crown
 - b. but, we run for an eternal reward
 - c. the athlete is as free as anyone to eat what he wants, to do what he wants
 - d. but he puts himself under limitations because he has a goal = winning the prize
 - e. even so - the Christian is free
 - f. but what is he aiming at, what is his goal
 - g. if his goal is to be effective for Christ, then like the athlete he is careful about what he does & how he lives

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

- 7. Paul's life was not aimless
- 8. He had a goal = To live & die for Christ.
 - a. his passion was to lead the lost to Christ.
 - b. and to lead the saved in Christ.
 - c. he would let nothing hinder that goal.
- 9. His life was like a race toward the tape - not a jog
- 10. His life was like a fight - not just shadow boxing - but with a real foe to be overcome - so he measured his punches & gave it his best shot

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

- 11. Paul knew the competition he was in was not with other Christians but with his own flesh.
 - a. it was his flesh which presented the biggest challenge to his effectiveness for Christ.
 - b. so he said he disciplined it
- disciplined - "to hit the eye"
- gave his body a black eye
 - c. not literal -

- means he was ruthless in resisting the downward pull the flesh
 - he didn't pamper it, nurture it
 - he beat it up
 - more a mindset than a practice
12. Example of wrestling & dieting = Hunger!
 13. Paul's concern was that after having preached Christ to others should somehow become disqualified from the race & lose his reward
 - a. not his salvation
 - b. but his reward for faithful service

III. CONCLUSION

- A. What's your Goal?
 1. Paul reveals a principle of life you & I need to take to heart -
 2. What is your goal? What are you in this thing we call life, for?
 3. Most people have no real goal - they don't have a clue as to what life is about or why they are here
 4. Story of grandfather talking to his grandson.
 - a. he was a Christian
 - b. but his grandson's family didn't go to church
 - c. "and then..."
 5. What is your ultimate, "And then" that gives an immediate "start now" to your life today?
 6. What is your goal?
 7. Paul's was to win the lost - and no price was too great to pay.
 8. Certainly not the loss of his personal rights!
 9. What rights are you giving up to attain some greater end?
- B. V. 19 - "I have made myself the servant of all"
 1. Story of Abraham Bininger.
 - a. in early 1800's, a young Swiss man named AB was converted to Christ by John Wesley
 - b. Bininger was so deeply affected by his conversion that he determined to live the rest of his life winning the lost
 - c. he heard about the Island of St. Thomas, which was a plantation island filled with slaves
 - d. the plantation owners had passed a law forbidding anyone but a slave to preach to the other slaves
 - e. Bininger was so deeply disturbed by this that he wrote the governor of the Island asking that if he gave up his freedom to become a slave, if they would let him come and preach
 - f. he promised to serve his master faithfully, but during his "off" time he simply asked for permission to share Christ with the slaves
 - g. the governor passed the letter on to the King of Denmark who was so moved by Bininger's devotion to God that he gave him the right to preach whenever and wherever he wanted.

2. May God give us the same kind of conviction and heart
3. That we might spend ourselves for the cause of Christ and the glory of our God.