



Discipline Over Regret: Session 4

1 Corinthians 9:19-27; 1 Timothy 4:7-10

3/17/19

MAIN POINT

To live light is to be one who shares what it means to be a follower of Christ with others and lives in godly discipline and not in regret of the past.

INTRODUCTION

Is there any job that you loved so much you would be willing to do it without pay?

Have you ever sacrificed your goals and priorities to help someone else? What was that like?

When Paul was traveling on the road to Damascus he heard the best news in the world. Paul came face to face with the resurrected Jesus, and it dramatically changed everything about his life. Before Paul met Jesus, he was a devout Pharisee and had earned a reputation as a fervent persecutor of the church. However, after his encounter with Jesus, Paul completely reoriented his life with one goal: Share the gospel of Jesus Christ with as many people as possible. To do this, he sacrificed comfort and financial gain in order to share the life he had found in Jesus.

UNDERSTANDING

Have a volunteer read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

- 19** *For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.*
- 20** *To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law;*
- 21** *to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law.*
- 22** *To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.*

23 *I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.*¹

As a missionary in the Mediterranean world, Paul had to deal with many different cultural standards. In these varying circumstances, he committed himself not to exercise his right to pursue the norms of his own cultural preferences, and not to insist on his freedoms under the gospel. This argument is much like his forfeiture of his right to eat meat.²

What does it mean to be a servant? How is this exemplified in Paul's ministry?

Paul did not limit whom he shared the gospel with. Instead he shared with a wide variety of people. Do you ever place limits on those you share the gospel with?

What does it look like to be "all things to all people"? What does it not look like?

Verse 23 refers to the blessings of the gospel. What are some of these blessings?

Transition: Paul always took the time to understand his audience. Though he never watered down the central message of the gospel, his ministry included numerous times when he gladly made social and personal accommodations to reach others. Paul made every effort to understand those he told about Jesus. Paul used the world against the world so that he could connect people with Christ.

Have a volunteer to read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

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

25 *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.*

26 *Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;*

27 *but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.*³

In the analogy of running the race, Paul spoke generally about his entire spiritual life. He lived like an athlete in every area of his life. In the context of this chapter, however, the more immediate reference is the way Paul gave up his rights for the sake of others. Self-denial in service to others is a difficult practice. Yet, Paul knew that it was necessary if he wanted to attain the prize of eternal life. By implication, the same is true of every believer, just as it was true of the knowledgeable ones in the Corinthian church. Paul used himself as an example for them to

¹ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (1 Co 9:19–23). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

² Pratt, R. L., Jr. (2000). [I & II Corinthians](#) (Vol. 7, p. 149). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

³ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (1 Co 9:24–27). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

follow. Since he, an apostle, had been willing to make such sacrifices, the Corinthians should be willing as well.⁴

Why is discipline in our lives essential as believers as we develop relationships with the lost and as we share the gospel?

To what does Paul compare discipline in the Christian life? How does Paul's analogy help us understand the Christian life?

In verse 25 Paul mentions a wreath (or in some translations a crown). What is the crown for the athletes? What is the crown for the Christian?

Transition: Like an athlete in training, Paul disciplined himself with a purpose—winning others to Christ. Paul frequently employed athletic metaphors to describe the rigors and focus required of the practice of self-discipline. He wanted all other desires in his life to be subject to his calling to lead people to Christ. If we want to consistently experience the blessings of the gospel, specifically in the area of bringing others to Jesus, we must focus on spiritual discipline.

Have a volunteer read 1 Timothy 4:7-10

- 7 *But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness;*
- 8 *for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.*
- 9 *It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance.*
- 10 *For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.*⁵

Paul instructed Timothy to train himself in godliness (v. 7). Paul stated that godliness “holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (v. 8). The word Paul used for “train” describes an athlete’s strenuous, rigorous, workouts. Train also is present in tense indicating that getting in shape and staying in shape was to be Timothy’s constant pursuit. Picture here an athlete giving every ounce of effort and energy to train for a future contest; so God’s people work hard at spiritual development. Clearly, one’s maturing in godliness calls for hard work, whereas our initial salvation was a gift from God. We must apply all our energy to pursuing God’s purposes.

Based on these verses, what does it mean to be godly?

Why do you think Paul chose to compare the practice of godliness to physical training?

⁴ Pratt, R. L., Jr. (2000). *I & II Corinthians* (Vol. 7, p. 153). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁵ *New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*. (1995). (1 Ti 4:7–10). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

How does the discipline required for godliness differ from what is required for salvation?

When you think of being godly, what kinds of actions and character traits come to mind?

What might a training program in godliness look like?

Transition: So what steps should be taken in this pursuit? Paul's recommendation to Timothy was to set the example for the rest of the believers "in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (v. 12). It's clear that Paul knew Timothy was influential in his role in Ephesus. It was important for Timothy to be a model of someone pursuing godliness, first by knowing the Scriptures. Furthermore, it was also important that Timothy's personal life reflect the things he taught. Paul knew (because he was living it in his own life) that achieving these goals would require ongoing training and discipline.

APPLICATION

In this passage we see Paul's deep passion for sharing the gospel. How would you describe your passion for serving God? When has it been the strongest? The weakest?

Is your life marked by service to others? How does service provide an inroad to share the gospel to people who might not otherwise listen? How can you serve someone this week?

For whom are you a model of Jesus Christ? What kind of model are they seeing?

At this time in your life, how disciplined are you in training for godliness?

What are one or two spiritual disciplines that need to become a part of your daily life?

How could we as a group be more intentional about training in godliness? What is the first step we need to take in that direction?