

There are several topics intertwined in this epistle and several surface in chapter 9. Underlying each issue was their lack of fervent love for the Lord and for one another.

They, at least some of them, were questioning his apostleship and his right to receive support from them. Yet they had been saved through his selfless efforts to bring the gospel to them. Seemingly, in their estimation, their home picked leaders were more qualified than the apostle Paul. We noticed this in the first few chapters.

They were exalting their own wisdom and knowledge looking down upon the “weak,” carelessly stumbling some of them as we see in chapter 8. They ought to have had loving care for one another, aware of the danger of stumbling others to sin by their liberty.

Now he presents his own life of **selfless service** for the Lord as an example for them. This is very instructive especially for aspiring evangelists. He gives up his personal comforts and habits so as to remove any obstacle in his daily life that might deter the lost from listening to him. The evangelist (and that’s any of us) is to engage those he is trying to reach by adapting to as much of their culture and traditions as possible, sin apart. The Lord Jesus Himself did this while He was here. Some missionaries unwisely have sought to reform the natives before they receive the gospel., for instance seeking to clothe their nakedness while they were still in their sins. This kind of thing turns people away from the message we have for them. This principle applies, not only for missionaries in foreign lands, but here in our earthly homeland. Today well meaning believers are trying to reform the nation by working for laws outlawing sinful practices such as abortion or homosexuality. These efforts seem to only stir up animosity and make enemies rather than leading to saving faith. Paul says we are to live among them, befriend them, eat their food, live in homes like them, perhaps even wear clothes like them, but always to remain holy, upright and to faithfully bring the word. We are to engage them not enrage them.

This idea isn’t an excuse to be conformed to this world. Just the opposite! Romans 12:1-2. The lost will see the difference in us if we are just normal folks, yet wholeheartedly living for the Lord. May the Lord give us a sharp consciousness and conscience to see the difference. After all, we are citizens of heaven sent to represent the ascended Lord Jesus here.

Paul is telling us to run the race with self abandoned zeal, persistence, with all our might. We are likened to Olympic athletes in our training, preparation, and running our event well, **to win**. A believer is not sent into this world to settle down as a “man of leisure.” Paul wasn’t. I used to think Paul was different. Yes, he was extraordinary. But he does not consider his energy and

drive as too exceptional for us to copy. He stands for no mere going-through-the-motions of being a Christian. No lukewarmness here! It’s full steam ahead! **There were men of prominence and charisma** in Corinth, spiritually gifted men. Men who had exceptional knowledge, wisdom, eloquence and leadership skills. But they were absorbed in themselves and how they looked to others around them. They were certainly active in the assembly, as we shall see, having all kinds of spiritual gifts to show off. What were they doing? Were they preaching the gospel clearly and forthrightly as Paul had?

Were they preaching the truth and encouraging one another in the Lord? They had instead turned the Lord’s Supper into a social event of questionable character, as we see in chapter 11. Paul challenges them, and us. It is possible to preach to others and yet be a castaway. Disqualified! Understandably this striking statement has been controversial. But what do we learn from this passage? A lost man can preach (or even be a clergyman). People may even be saved through his preaching. But the act of preaching to others does not guarantee my soul is saved.

We know from other scriptures that no one can pluck a saved person out of God’s hand. Not even himself, not that any truly saved person would ever want to. So this scripture, frightening as it is, cannot mean that one can be lost once God has saved them.

A believer can walk with the Lord and serve the Lord and later fall into sin. David did. Abraham did. Noah did. Others have. Some we may even know of today. They were disqualified, useless as a witness for God in the state they were in when they sinned. Furthermore, if a believer persists in sinful behavior the Lord may cast him away by taking him out of this earth to heaven. There is a sin unto death. 1John 5. But God specializes in lifting up the fallen and usually uses us as His agents to help.

So don’t be frightened of losing your salvation if you fall. Peter denied the Lord and was restored. **But** be sure you have truly, in your heart, trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ and His blood shed on the cross. There is no other way to reach heaven, or avoid hell. Those that try, even if “religious,” will find themselves castaway, disqualified. The Pharisees prided themselves on their superior righteousness yet they were mostly castaways. There were exceptions, such as Nicodemus, whom God moved to seek the Lord Jesus for salvation.

But He is an awesome, holy God. We are to fear and reverence Him. We are to serve Him and not ourselves. We are to glorify Him and not ourselves. The man Christ Jesus showed the pattern for our lives. Paul and the other apostles followed Him. We can too.

By Ron Canner, May 28, 2003