

“Exercise Self-Control in All Things”  
(1 Corinthians 9:25)

Introduction: In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul is comparing the Christian life to an athletic competition. He does so, because like one who competes, the Christian is to put forth an extreme amount of effort to attain his goal. In verse 24, he tells us that the athletes who run, all run knowing that only one will win the prize. It cannot be said here, as it is in so many other things, there are no losers. Only one will win and the rest will lose. Applying this to the Christian life, he tells us to run as though there can only be one winner. **“Run in such a way that you may win”** (9:24). Put as much effort forth as the one who seeks to obtain the prize for himself. Those athletes are only running for temporary honors and a perishable prize. But we are running for eternal honor and an imperishable prize.

He goes on to tell us how to do this. In verse 25, he says that those who agonize in these games, who struggle, who fight, who do the very best they can to win, exercise self-control in all things. This is another lesson which we must learn from the athlete. Those who seek to win the prize do not simply stroll out onto the field with no preparation to compete. They live an exacting life of discipline and rigor. They seek mastery over their minds and their bodies. This means that they are careful how much work and training they do and how much rest and recreation they allow themselves. They take care with what they eat and with what they don't eat. They lead a disciplined life knowing that it may make or break them in the final competition that is coming.

The point is that, if they will do these things for something which is futile and which will rot away and perish, how much more should you, Christian, who are competing in the greatest race of all. If they will do this for something which is so unimportant, won't you put forth at least this much effort to obtain that which is infinitely more valuable? Won't you strive like this to please your Lord? The Christian life is a struggle in which you must employ all of your might to serve the Lord, in the fear of the Lord, as we saw this morning. You must fight to master fully the truth of God and to live skillfully the Christian life. You must exercise self-control in all things so that you can focus on the race that the Lord has set your feet on and not be distracted by the things of the world. You must run with a specific goal in front of your eyes. You must direct your assaults on the enemy's stronghold with accuracy in your prayers and in your witnessing. And you must buffet your bodies to subdue the power of sin in your members so that in the end you will not be cast away from the Lord. Be exhorted to put your all into the Christian race.

But the thing that I would like for us to focus on this evening is the area of self-control. Self-control has to do with your ability to govern your actions and your desires in all areas to strengthen you in the race to which Christ calls you. This means that you must exercise self-control over all your passions. There are sins of the heart, and sins of the mind. There are those sins which no one else can see. They are the evil thoughts and motives which are hidden away in your soul. There are also sins which are outwardly committed, such as when you offer up the members of your body as instruments of unrighteousness to do the devil's work. And there are those sins which are committed against your body, when you do things with your body and to your body which God forbids. These affect your soul as well, because being forbidden by God, they are sin, and sin always has a corrupting and hardening effect on your heart. But

they also affect your soul because of its union with your body. Whatever happens to the body has ramifications also for that immaterial part of your being. This can affect your ability to run the race as well. What I am specifically talking about now are the abuses of those things which the Lord has given to us for our good, specifically in the area of eating and drinking, and of working and resting.

What I would like to deal with particularly this evening is this principle as it bears on the sixth commandment, **"You shall not murder."** Since we are to preserve our lives, not only spiritually, but also physically, I would like to deal with the proper use and abuse of food and drink, and work and rest, as it figures into the successful living of the Christian life. What I want you to see is that,

*In all these good gifts of the Lord, you are to exercise moderation and self-control.*

**I. First, Let's Consider the Righteous Use of Food and Drink.**

**A. We Know that God Is The Creator of These Things and He Made Them All Good and for Our Good.**

1. The Bible tells us that God made this provision for His creatures on day three when He separated the water from the land.
  - a. Moses wrote, **"Then God said, 'Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind, with seed in them, on the earth'; and it was so. And the earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit, with seed in them, after their kind; and God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day"** (Gen. 1:11-13).
  - b. Then we read, in verse 29, **"Then God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food'; and it was so"** (1:29-30).
  - c. It appears from this that the Lord did not intend for man to eat meat at this time. But He did later after the Fall.
  - d. But we must not conclude from this that God doesn't want us to eat meat, for He is the One who told us that we could. After Noah and his family left the ark, God said, **"Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant. Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood"** (Gen. 9:3-4).
2. God is not only the One who creates food, but through His gracious Providence, He also continues to provide it.
  - a. The psalmist writes, **"He gives to the beast its food, and to the young ravens which cry"** (Ps. 147:9).
  - b. **"He sends forth springs in the valleys; they flow between the mountains; they give drink to every beast of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. Beside them the birds of the heavens dwell; they lift up *their* voices among the branches. He waters the mountains from His upper chambers; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of His works. He causes the grass to grow for the cattle,**

**and vegetation for the labor of man, so that he may bring forth food from the earth . . . The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their food from God” (104:10-14, 21).**

c. Food is a good gift from the Lord.

3. God also made things for us to drink, and, as I noted in a previous sermon, He gave us wine to make our hearts happy.

a. After the psalmist says that God causes the vegetation to grow for man, he then says that God also gave him **“wine which makes man’s heart glad”** (Ps. 104:15).

b. Wine is a good gift from the Lord, as well as food.

c. The Bible says that everything God gave us is good. Paul writes to Timothy, **“For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer”** (1 Tim. 4:4-5).

d. But we must remember that it is good if it is used for the right purposes for which He created it.

e. There are certain things He has given us that some misuse. I don’t think the Lord intended us to use tobacco for smoking or poppies for opium, or peyote for hallucinogenic effects.

B. But Even Though Food and Wine Are Good and Lawful, Their Abuse Is Sinful.

1. For instance, food is good when it is used to give us strength and to sustain us. But if we eat more than we need, then it can become sin.

a. This is what we used to call the socially acceptable sin. Now there are more and more sins which are accepted as such.

b. But the Bible actually condemns the practice of overeating. It calls this practice gluttony. Such a person is one who wastes his money on self-indulgence.

c. The Pharisees used this as a term of derision for our Lord. Jesus pointing out their hypocrisy, said, **“For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon!’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners”** (Matt. 11:18-19).

d. Food is a good thing, but too much of a good thing is not good.

e. It can have consequences on your health. It has been proven that those who are overweight are much more likely to develop heart disease than those who are lean.

f. It also tends to make you drowsy and lazy when you eat too much. As a result, it hinders your work so that you cannot do enough to provide for yourself. Solomon writes, **“Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, Or with gluttonous eaters of meat; for the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags”** (Prov. 23:20).

g. Gluttony comes from loving food too much. You are no longer eating for energy and sustenance, but for pleasure. This is all too common in our world today. There is nothing wrong with enjoying your food. It is only when you enjoy it too much.

h. Solomon again writes, **“When you sit down to dine with a ruler, Consider carefully what is before you; and put a knife to your throat, if you are a man of great appetite. Do not desire his delicacies”** (Prov. 23:1-3).

- i. It can also make you sick. **“Have you found honey? Eat only what you need, Lest you have it in excess and vomit it”** (Prov. 25:16).
  - j. The most dangerous thing about it is that to overeat is a sin.
  - k. Don’t let food become an idol to you. Don’t let your life revolve around it.
  - l. Use it wisely to enhance your ability to serve the Lord. Eat those things which will give you the most strength, the most energy, the most mental clarity.
  - m. Don’t overeat and shorten your life, and also make what little time you have less effective.
2. And of course, it is also sinful to drink too much.
- a. To drink too much is to be guilty of the sin of drunkenness.
  - b. Those who practice this sin as a pattern of life are called drunkards.
  - c. The most serious thing about this sin is that those who are abusers of wine and strong drink in this way will be excluded from the Kingdom of God. Paul writes, **“Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God”** (1 Cor. 6:9-10).
  - d. Paul also says that if someone who calls himself a brother practices this sin, you are not even to sit down to eat with them. Again, Paul writes, **“I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one”** (1 Cor. 5:9-11).
  - e. Beyond the fact that this is a serious sin, it also has very dangerous effects on the body. It destroys your liver and your brain cells. It can destroy your life and put you out on the street. It will certainly ruin your ability to think clearly. In this state, you couldn’t serve the Lord if you wanted to.
  - f. And so the apostle Paul admonishes us, **“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit”** (Eph. 5:18). Don’t be under the influence of this mindless substance, but be completely under the control of the great Author of Holiness!

## II. Secondly, Let’s Consider the God-honoring Use of Work and Rest.

- A. Work Is the Means by Which God Has Ordained that We Get What We Need to Live, and Rest Is that Means by Which We Are Refreshed.
  - 1. Work was something that was ordained by God at the very beginning of the Creation.
    - a. It is not the result of the Fall.
    - b. God originally put the man in the garden to cultivate it and to guard it against intruders (Gen. 2:15).
    - c. Of course, work became much harder after the Fall. God said to Adam, **“Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life”** (Gen. 3:17).

2. Rest too was something which was ordained by God at the beginning, both a nightly rest, and a weekly rest.
    - a. God made man so that he needed to have a certain amount of sleep each evening. How much He intended, we don't know. Apparently, the need for each person is different. Whether or not this was solely the result of the Fall or not, we can't tell. But certainly the Fall must have increased the requirement for sleep because of the corruption and weakness of his body which resulted.
    - b. But God also ordained the Sabbath rest at the very beginning of His Creation. It appears that Adam and Eve celebrated their first Sabbath even before they finished their first week of work. For God created them on day six, and He ordained the Sabbath on day seven (Gen. 2:1-3).
    - c. Something which was also from the beginning was recreation. It is another form of resting which is meant to recreate you, to refresh you after long hours of work. Apparently, God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden prior to the Fall (Gen. 3:8). If this is true, there could certainly not have been anything more refreshing to the godly soul than to walk with his Creator.
    - d. Work is good and rest is good when used for what the Lord made them for.
- B. But to Work Too Much, or To Rest Too Much Can Also Be Sinful.
1. Usually the problem that we face is not working too much, but too little. However there are some who overwork.
    - a. If you spend too much time working in one area, you can neglect other equally important areas of responsibility.
    - b. Overworking can also take its toll on your health.
  2. The biggest problem by far, however, is with those who sleep too much, or recreate too much, and work too little.
    - a. Most people today see work as a necessary evil. They endure the week only to live for the weekend.
    - b. But as we've already seen, work is something which God ordained at the beginning. He made man to work. We find our purpose in labor. It is not unreasonable to suppose that we will also have some work to do in heaven.
    - c. There, we will rest from the toil which we face in this fallen world, but that doesn't mean that we will totally cease from all activity. We know that we will at least worship the Lord. It will not be hard work, but joyful activity.
    - d. To resist work in this life, then, knowing that it is the means which the Lord has ordained to provide for our needs, only to spend our time in sleep and recreation, is sinful. It is called slothfulness, and the one who indulges in it, a sluggard.
    - e. It results in poverty. Solomon writes, **"How long will you lie down, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? 'A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest"-- and your poverty will come in like a vagabond, and your need like an armed man"** (Prov. 6:9-11).
    - f. For some it may even end in death. Again, Solomon writes, **"The desire of the sluggard puts him to death, for his hands refuse to work; all day long he is craving"** (Prov. 21:25-26).
    - g. Some recreations can become idolatrous. I have seen many people who live for

football, baseball, and basketball far more than they live for their Lord. They can also steal from you those more important things, the important responsibilities that you only have so much time to do, the things that are necessary for the maintenance of yourself and your family.

- h. Rest is good and recreation is good, but too much rest or too much recreation, or the wrong kind of recreation can be bad, very bad.
- i. In closing, listen to the sound wisdom of William Law, in a quote from his book entitled, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. He says, “For the Son of God has redeemed us for this only end, that we should, by a life of reason and piety, live to the glory of God; this is the only rule and measure for every order and state of life. Without this rule, the most lawful employment becomes a sinful state of life.

“Take away this from the life of a clergyman, and his holy profession serves only to expose him to a greater damnation. Take away this from tradesmen, and shops are but so many houses of greediness and filthy lucre. Take away this from gentlemen, and the course of their life becomes a course of sensuality, pride, and wantonness. Take away this rule from our tables, and all falls into gluttony and drunkenness. Take away this measure from our dress and habits, and all is turned into such paint, and glitter, and ridiculous ornaments, as are a real shame to the wearer. Take away this from the use of our fortunes, and you will find people sparing in nothing but charity. Take away this from our diversions, and you will find no sports too silly, nor any entertainments too vain and corrupt, to be the pleasure of Christians. If, therefore, we desire to live unto God, it is necessary to bring our whole life under this law, to make His glory the sole rule and measure of our acting in every employment of life. For there is no other true devotion, but this of living devoted to God in the common business of our lives” (Law *Serious* 39-40 [Sage]).

- j. May God grant that we may so order the affairs of our lives to give Him glory. Amen.