

Intro:

1. Fourth of July – Independence Day
2. Pray for Colons

Study:

1. In the 8th chapter Paul wrote the believers in Corinth telling them it was okay to eat meat that had been offered to an idol so long as it didn't stumble another person.
 - a. Before they ate that meat, or in our case today, perform that activity that is not explicitly prohibited in the bible, we must ask ourselves, "*will my actions stumble another brother or sister in Christ?*"
 - b. We have a tremendous amount of freedom and liberty in Christ, **but** if what we are doing stumbles another brother, then we must avoid that action or activity.
2. At the beginning of chapter 9, as we saw last week, Paul reaffirms his position, authority, rights, and privileges as an Apostle and minister of the gospel.
 - a. Read 1 Cor 9:1, 2b, 8
3. Then Paul uses himself as an example of the principle taught in chap 8
 - a. As it related to receiving tithes and offering from the believers in Corinth.
 - b. 1 Cor 9:14, 15
4. Important to understand: Paul is using the topic of a minister's compensation to lead the Christians in Corinth, and you and me, to a more significant spiritual principle.
 - a. As we finish the 9th chapter this morning, we'll see that we should have a different goal in mind, it's not about a salary or earthly compensation;
 - b. We should be focusing on a different activity and a different type of reward or prize.

Read 1 Cor 9:16-18, 24-27 and Pray¹

¹ Unless otherwise marked, all scriptures taken from the New King James Version. © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

1 Corinthians 9:16

¹⁶ For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!

1. Paul's principal concern and activity was that of preaching the gospel.
2. Paul's words remind me of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah.
 - a. Jeremiah was probably the most unpopular and unsuccessful prophet of all time.
 - b. Aside from his assistant Baruch, Jeremiah had no following. No one that believed in his message.
 - c. He was despised because his message from God was a message of judgment.
 - d. For too long the children of Israel had forsaken God who *is* the fountain of living waters.
 - i. Like an unfaithful adulterous wife who left her husband, Israel had left God and pursued selfish pleasures and false gods.
 - e. So God gave Jeremiah the task of warning the people of the coming judgment.
 - i. Jeremiah's message was that Israel was going to be conquered by the Babylonian empire and that they should accept this situation.
 - f. But no one wanted to listen. Instead, they mocked Jeremiah, ignored him, hit him and even imprisoned him because of these messages of judgment upon the people.
 - g. From jail, Jeremiah decided that he'd stop speaking of God altogether. All it had done was gotten him into trouble so he was not going to do it anymore.
 - h. Jeremiah 20:9 *Then I said, "I will not make mention of Him, Nor speak anymore in His name." But His word was in my heart like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, And I could not.*
 - i. He couldn't help but to preach the Word!
 - j. This should not be limited to Jeremiah and Paul only...
3. Our chief activity should also be in preaching the gospel.

- a. 2 Tim 4:2 *Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.*
 - b. 1 Peter 3:15 *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear*
 - c. Appropriate old saying, “*Preach the Gospel always; if necessary, use words.*”
 - i. What we ‘do’ speaks louder than words. The way you live your life can preach the gospel.
 - d. When others can see your dependence upon Jesus Christ in all that you do, then you are preaching the gospel by the way you live.
4. Do you love the Lord your God with all your Heart, Soul, and Strength?
- a. Are you willing to serve others before taking care of yourself?
 - b. Are you willing to forgive others just as God has forgiven you?
 - c. Are you swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath? (James 1:19)
 - i. These are just a few ways you can preach the Gospel through actions.

1 Corinthians 9:17-18 ¹⁷ For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. ¹⁸ What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.

1. When we willingly serve the Lord, in the Lord’s way, we are promised a reward.
2. When we get to verse 25 we’ll see what reward Paul is talking about.
 - a. But before we get there, notice that Paul speaks of preaching the gospel against his will.
3. That’s like Jonah who didn’t want to preach the gospel to those in Nineveh.
 - a. When God told him to go, Jonah fled; you know the story...
 - b. He got on a ship that was hit by a massive sea storm
 - c. In order to save the rest of the ships’ crew from dying from the storm, they threw Jonah overboard and a great fish swallowed Jonah.

- d. But he didn't die in the belly of that fish or whale.
 - e. Oh no, like Marlin and Dory in 'Finding Nemo' he was transported to where he need to go and then was spit out.
 - f. So Jonah, finally preached the word and the people got saved, but Jonah missed out on the blessing of being a part of a wonderful work of God
 - g. Instead, Jonah had to get a sun burn and suffer dehydration in order for the Lord to get a hold of this guy's attention.
4. Another man who served the Lord against his will was Ananias in Acts 9.
- a. Paul had an encounter with the resurrected Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus which left Paul temporarily blind.
 - b. The Lord came to a certain man Ananias telling him to go find Saul/Paul and to pray for him that he might receive his sight.
 - c. Ananias didn't want to go; he had heard about how Saul had persecuted the Christians, but the Lord said Go anyways and he did!
5. Even Paul himself understood that even if he didn't want to go, he needed to anyways, for that's what stewardship is all about.
- a. Stewardship – Taking personal responsibility to take care of that which has been given to you.
 - b. Paul wasn't fickle or hot and cold concerning his conduct and activities in the ministry.
 - c. Paul was fully committed to serving the Lord in all areas of his life.
 - d. He is a great example for you and me.
6. If the Lord is leading you to get involved in some particular area of ministry, be a faithful steward of the responsibilities and opportunities God has given you.
- a. If you search the scriptures you find that God is not looking for results, numbers, and positive statistics from you; God's looking for faithfulness.
 - b. If you abide in the vine (John 15), He'll take care of the fruit.

1 Corinthians 9:24

²⁴ Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize?

Run in such a way that you may obtain *it*.

1. Paul often used athletic metaphors.
 - a. I'd like to think that's because Paul was a big sports fan himself.
 - b. Actually, if Paul were alive today I have no doubt that he would be a New England Patriots fan ☺
 - c. The people he was writing to would certainly understand the metaphors Paul used because Corinthian was home to the biennial Isthmian games, which were almost as popular as the Olympic games.
2. As you well know, in a race, all runners run, but only one person can take 1st place.
 - a. To the person who crosses the line first goes the prize.
3. Paul is relating the Christian life to a runner and he's saying, run like you want to come in first place.
 - a. Two weeks ago we watched a great video at the Bakers on Sunday evening where Ray Vander Laan toured an actual ancient Greek and Roman stadium where these races took place.
 - b. How do you come in first? How do you even make the team? By giving it your very best.
 - c. Are you just jogging, are you walking, have you stopped moving forward altogether, have you put yourself on the bench?
 - d. What do you want to be found doing at the end of life/when the Lord returns?
4. To be effective in a race, you must know what type of race you are in and where you are running.
 - a. It's also helpful to know how long the course is that you are running.
5. What type of the race are we in as Christians?
 - a. It's often been said that we are in a marathon and not a short-distance sprint.
 - b. That's true when you talk about our entire life. We are in this for the long-haul.

- c. And it helps if you practice and participate as though you are going to go the distance.
 - d. The ultimate goal in this life is becoming like Christ.
 - i. We are told to put on Christ and to put on the new self which is life hidden in Christ.
6. In a race, when the gun goes off, you need to know which way to go.
- a. We are blessed that the base has allowed our kids to participate in the youth sports programs.
 - b. There have been a few occasions in the younger age groups where one of the kids will run the wrong way and kick a goal or shoot a basket on their own goal.
 - c. They didn't know which way to go. We can do that too in the race of life.
 - d. So how do we know which way to go?
7. We need to read the rule book. The Bible. But please don't misunderstand me; the Bible is not some boring collections of regulations that suck the life out of you.
- a. The bible gives us our guidelines and directions for life and it does so in an amazing and powerful way...
 - b. Hebrews 4:12, *For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*
8. Next question: How long is the race?
- a. We don't know. Concerning life itself, we have no promise of tomorrow.
 - b. We have to remember that today could be our last.
 - c. But it's best to have a marathon like mentality, to go the distance.
9. But sometimes, God gives us shorter intermediate races to run in.
- a. The race of being an F-18 pilot. Being a platoon sergeant. Being a mom to one or more preschoolers.

- b. And that race is a sprint; you have to go at full-speed in order to keep up.
 - i. How many of you are just exhausted at the end of a normal day?
- c. I'm here to tell you, that sometimes following God and being a good steward means you are going to be involved in some exhausting work.
 - i. A short distance sprint.

10. Being able to see when there's an end in sight is helpful.

- a. For example, VBS which we have planned for August is exhausting!
- b. But we know that when Friday comes we are done.
- c. Sometimes it is so helpful to stop for a minute, get your bearings by reading the Word and having a personal devotion time, and then get going again.
- d. If you don't see an end in sight, then be prayerful, asking God to give you wisdom on how much to give and how fast you should be going.

11. But to each of us, we are to run as though we are trying to cross the line for the prize.

1 Corinthians 9:25a ²⁵ **And everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things.**

- 1. That just means that he who competes exercises self-control.
 - a. All athletes know that you must be on a strict diet & exercise regiment in order to do well and to perform at your best.
 - b. Being an athlete affects almost every area of life.
 - i. What you eat and drink, what activities you do, how much sleep you get, what clothes you wear.
- 2. So too in this life, we must exercise discipline and self-control otherwise we will be hindered in whatever race the Lord has us involved in.
 - a. Is there anything that is hindering you from serving the Lord without reservation?

1 Corinthians 9:25b **Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for* an imperishable *crown*.**

1. Here is the reward.
 - a. Not a perishable crown. At the Isthmian games, the winner won't get gold, silver and bronze medals like they do today; they'd get a wreath crown.
 - b. The wreath would die, it didn't last; it was perishable.
2. But God rewards faithful servants with an imperishable crown.
3. Many count this crown as a separate crown from the others listed. If that's true then there are five crowns spoken of that we can receive from the Lord.
 - a. The imperishable or incorruptible crown – 1 Cor 9:25
 - b. Crown of rejoicing – 1 Thes 2:19
 - c. Crown of righteousness – 2 Tim 4:8
 - d. Crown of glory – 1 Peter 5:4
 - e. Crown of life – Rev 2:10
4. What are these crowns for?
 - a. I believe the answer is found in Revelation 4:10-11 *the twenty-four elders (who (according to verse 4) had crowns of gold on their head) fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created."*
 - b. With the crowns we receive, we will throw them back to the Lord in worship of the One who is worthy to receive glory and honor and power!
 - c. What a beautiful thing to consider!
5. I don't want to miss out on any part of that and neither does Paul...

1 Corinthians 9:26a ²⁶ **Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty.**

1. Paul knows the type of race he's in, he knows the length of the race, he knows which direction to go and he's running with the goal of receiving that prize!

Paul continues in 1 Corinthians 9:26b **Thus I fight: not as *one who* beats the air.**

1. He's not off in the corner by himself shadow boxing. He's engaged in the real deal.
2. Ephesians 6:12

And in 1 Corinthians 9:27 Paul says, ²⁷ **But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.**

1. Paul's not talking about losing his salvation, he's talking about not wanting to lose his opportunity to serve the Lord.
2. If you continue to neglect your opportunities to serve the Lord, you may lose the opportunity to be used by the Lord.
 - a. Continuing to walk in the flesh can cause you to become disqualified and lose your opportunity to be used by God in any type of public ministry.

What are we to do? How do we apply these verses?

1. By purposing in our heart and mind to get up and get in the race.
 - a. Sadly, too many of us have been sitting on the bench or just walking the track.
 - b. We need to run, and to run like we want the prize.
2. What opportunities has the Lord given you? You need to run after them!
3. I'm not saying you must run to earn your salvation.
 - a. But Paul is saying that if you run you will be rewarded and that reward will be your ticket into a very special worship session in Heaven
 - b. Where you'll take any crowns you've earned and cast them at the Lamb's feet.
 - c. I want to be there! Do you? Then let's run together!