

3 High-Priority Topics (1 Corinthians 9)

by Shane Idleman

This sermon delves into three key topics from 1 Corinthians chapter 9: uncovering motives, relating to the culture, and the power of self-discipline. Paul's defense of his motives highlights the importance of examining our intentions and staying focused on God's approval. The call to relate to the culture emphasizes affecting, not being infected by it, while maintaining moderation and control. The power of self-discipline is crucial in running the race of faith with certainty and obtaining the imperishable crown. The practical applications include evaluating areas lacking self-discipline and being solid in essentials while full of love and grace.

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Topics: "Motives", "Self-Discipline"

Description

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Transcript

specific, but what happened is I was in 1st Corinthians chapter 9, if you have your Bibles turn to 1st Corinthians chapter 9, and three topics seemed to stand out from that passage. But as I was going through each day, the topics begin to grow. So it almost, I almost thought, well this could be three different sermons, but I'm gonna try to get through what I believe God has put on my heart for this season here, not only for our church, but for those listening.

So 1st Corinthians chapter 9 verse 1, the first topic is uncovering motives. Paul is going to uncover his motives. The reason he's having to do this is because people are challenging his motives.

He's saying, my defense to those who examine me is this. Have you ever had your motives challenged? It happens all the time in church. Not from you, of course, but those outside the church always like to challenge the motives of the church, challenge the motives of a pastor.

And on one hand, that's not necessarily bad, because we need to be examined. We need people to lovingly critique. But the vast majority of people out there do not have that loving spirit about them.

They just, they just think that you're, you're in it for the money. Here, I'll just give you an example. Every time I release a new book, I get people saying, oh, there you go again.

There you go again. And they forget that they are free downloads. The free, free downloads.

And then a print-on-demand Amazon will only let us go so low before there's cost for cover. You know, cover costs money to print. Paper costs money.

So we go as low as we can in many cases. Free download. And yet, people still make, and still say things.

I think I got \$85 last year. For the whole year. And, but no matter what you say, they still want to examine your motives.

Not even mentioning all the costs involved. I'm going on a rabbit trail. I'm sorry.

I get back, get back on here. Am I not an apostle, Paul said. So they're challenging his authority.

Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? So, so they're challenging who he is. And he said, if I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. So the people, even in his own congregation, were growing a little bit, maybe not weary, but they were starting to complain and grumble.

And you know that can happen in church? It takes one little grumbler. Call him a little gremlin. One little guy.

You just let that guy loose. And it starts to infiltrate the whole church. Unless somebody stops it dead in its tracks.

And that grumbling and complaining, if you're not too sure what God's view is on that, just read the Old Testament. They weren't able to go into the promised land because of grumbling and complaining. And I wonder how many blessings are missed? On that note, I want to encourage you to be here next Sunday.

God has already put the message on my heart yesterday. All the points on this topic of God blessing us. And there could be something hindering that blessing.

And it's actually coming from the Old Testament there on what the nation of Israel went through and why they didn't walk into the promised land. Did you realize that? That God said, here's your promised land. I'm gonna lead you to it.

I mean, a journey probably, I don't know, they estimate 11 days, 14 days, 20 days. A journey to the promised land that could have took days, ended up taking 40 years. And it says, the Bible says, He kept testing them and testing them.

And by the time they got there, nobody went into the promised land. That's a lot of grumblers and complainers except Joshua and Caleb. And you say, well Shane, that's Old Testament.

That doesn't really apply. Now there's a different God today. He's a nice God.

That was a mean God. And we're not under all that anymore. Well, next chapter in 1st Corinthians, Paul said that these were given to us as examples that we might not lust after evil things like they lusted, and they are an example to us on how to live.

There's principles there we can glean from. So Paul said, am I not an apostle to others? Oh, even if I'm not, I'm doubtless to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. In other words, real ministry has fruit.

When you see changed lives, that is fruit of the ministry. And that is what I can say by all the ministries going on at this church. So one thing that stands out to me above anything else is changed lives.

Radically changed lives. Because fluff is not fruit. There's a lot of church where there's some, oh yeah man, I'm reading the Bible a little bit more.

Thank you. That was so encouraging. No, has your life been changed? Not just fluffy.

Yeah, you know, I'm kind of, I'm listening to Error One now on the radio station, you know, and I'm listening to, not 91.9, funny sidetrack. I gotta tell you this joke. Not a joke, but a funny illustration.

Me and Morgan, we were going over Q&A questions, you know, and we did the Q&A on Wednesday night. If you didn't see that, check it out. But one of the questions, what do you what do you guys argue about? And I was just gonna joke about this, but it's kind of true.

But every time I get in her car, it's got Error One on. I'm like, why don't we have our station on it? Well there's, I just, all the music. I'm like, okay, I understand.

So I change it and it's just, it's a fun thing. We don't get mad because I go back and forth sometimes too. But anyway, so fruit, real ministry has fruit.

There are changed lives. When God is working, there is a changed life. And I don't just mean self-control.

I mean there is a love now for God's Word. There's now a love for others. There's sincere humility.

There's genuine repentance. There's a love for worship. See, everything's changed.

Not just why I feel better. You can go through rehab and feel better. But there's a changed life there.

So Paul's saying, look at all the fruit that is being, and you could just look at the Bible. You know, they try to, they try to disprove the Bible and you can look at it, you know, I've told you before, historically and archeologically and scientifically, prophetically. It's so, it's so true in those areas.

But the greatest testimony to the truth of Scripture are the countless, and I mean countless, changed lives that read the Word and they are actually changed from the inside out. You can't do that. You can't just make that up.

But we also see here that even Paul's ministry was being challenged. Paul was being challenged. His apostleship, his leadership.

Now we've taught before, I've taught before that there are times to ignore your critics, but there are also times to answer your critics. And in the church we have two opposing views. We have those people that are always very challenging.

They're always on you. That's like, give me a break. But then we have those who don't say anything.

And let me tell you, this is a struggle for the church, this church, to find this balance. Because, and I kind of would probably lean towards this side. Me and my wife talk, laugh about this often.

I'm like, hopefully it just fix itself. Hopefully that situation just fixes itself. Hopefully that'll, and guess what? Mmm, not very often.

They usually, I'm like, you know, you just want to like just walk away from conflict. As Christians, we just want to walk away from conflict, but that's actually not very healthy. I'm reading a really good book right now.

I'm actually gonna recommend, even though I haven't finished the rest of it, it's called Killing the Church. The Failure to Confront. And he talks about growing, vibrant churches are churches that confront wrong attitudes, wrong attitudes in ministry, wrong attitudes in the church.

They confront gossip. They confront living in sin. Not because they're sin sniffers, but because they actually love the people.

Isn't that true? Here's just a quick excerpt. I told Pastor Abram, I'm gonna give him a copy of this one. Most of us would rather be in the, be the calming voice of compromise than the bold voice of confrontation.

Now, believe it or not, this doesn't apply to me in the pulpit. I have no problem being the voice of confrontation in the pulpit, but when it comes to individuals, you know, we seem to take on the mile to meet Jesus, which is good, but sometimes we have to be that voice of confrontation. Why do we allow those we love to flounder through life, empty and void of any real life change? Because bringing about that change would require a painful encounter, a painful conversation.

And we can all think of somebody. I can name ten people right now that I should probably go and talk to. Actually, you know, I've done it in the past, and it's hard, but you go and you talk, and you say, you know what, your attitude, your arrogance is hurting your family.

That addiction is the way you're treating your kids. And go to them because I love them. But what do I do often? Go to the prayer closet.

God, change him. God, change him. Shane, go and warn them.

No, no. I'll do it. Hopefully they'll hear our sermon.

Hopefully they'll hear our sermon. And we tend to be non-confrontational, and Paul loved the people enough to tell them the truth. So maybe God is tugging on your heart this morning.

Is there someone you need to lovingly confront? Because you love them enough to tell them the truth. If not, we leave them floundering. We leave them in difficult situations.

So someone who truly loves someone. Now, here's the key though. Don't be excited about going out and going and telling people off.

That's the wrong attitude. I can't wait to get them. Wait till I see them.

See, that's the wrong heart. But if you come to them and you say, I'm actually fearful on how you're going to take this and how you're going to respond, but I love you enough to tell you the truth. Thank God for those who have come to me in that situation.

I've had people over the years come to me and tell me exactly that. And what does it do? It sharpens you. It breaks you.

It gets that little chip of pride off for a season. And it begins to humble you, hopefully. Now, not everybody will be receptive to that, but that's not your job.

Often they're not receptive, but they will later. Remember the seed you planted? Because here's what happens. You hit them with that, they react in anger.

Then they go out, and then God deals with them. And then they often come back, or maybe they won't. But we love them enough to confront.

I mean, I would assume that the majority of marriages that I know about that are in trouble is because people are failing to confront and love someone enough to tell them the truth. There could be the passive wife that's just very calm and quiet, never going to say anything. She's not going to address this arrogance she sees in her husband, this demeaning, dominating attitude.

And she's just going to submit to it, which is in one sense, submission is good. But biblical submission is not submitting while you're enabling the person to continue in their sin. You don't just submit, and submit, and submit, and submit, and submit, and enable that person to be a jerk.

There comes a time and place where as I'm submitting to your leadership, I'm confronting your attitude. It's hurting the family. It's hurting our relationship.

And God will use you to lovingly confront that person. So confrontation can be very biblical. And I just hope I remember all that for the second service because nothing is in the notes.

So verse 3, my defense to those who examine me is this. Oh, Paul has a defense. Because I used to read like Billy Graham's books, and sometimes I would get like, well that doesn't make a lot of sense.

I see where he's coming from. But he'd say, I never answer my critics. And maybe at that level you just, you can't.

So but I've always, you know, and people, pastors have told me that. You never answer your critics, Shane. Just let them talk.

I'm like, but doesn't there come a time and a place sometimes to say, you are lying. Don't confront what's going on in our government. Don't confront what's going on in California.

Don't confront critics of the ministry. Now you shouldn't go around answering all these different people. I mean, I've had a band, more people on Facebook probably than you have friends.

So I know they're, because the critics and the critics and the critics, they just want to critique. They don't have a loving heart. But there is a time and a place.

And I think it's this. I think if you're not responding, I mean, I'm sorry, you're not reacting in anger, but you're responding, God said, you know what, that's just not true. To give a defense for why you're doing something and pray about it.

And I think it's okay to defend why a person has done something when the need arises. My defense to those who examine me is this. It is only, is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? Whoever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? So guess what's happening? Paul, you need to work really hard in the ministry and not benefit from it.

And this is the danger of really a pastor for hire. Praise God that didn't happen here. But a lot of my friends have come into a church that's 30, 40, 50 years old, and people tell them, you're here to do what we tell you to do until the next guy gets here.

And the board actually dictates how you preach, how long you stay, how you run the church. That's not a lead pastor. That's a restrained pastor that just does whatever the board wants.

And usually it's not spirit-filled people leading. A healthy church has the elders coming alongside and leading the church together. And that's why we call my position leader among equals.

My position is the lead pastor to lead the church among the equality of the elders. The church government is called a plurality of elders. It's ran by a plurality of men who meet the criteria.

So Paul is saying here, should I not benefit from the labor? Should I not eat the fruit of my labor? And then he goes on to say, for it is written in the law of Moses, you shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain. So what was happening is an ox would be treading the grain. And I don't want to give you an illustration, because I don't quite know how the oxen did it, but he had this mechanism and he would just walk in the circle and tread the grain and crush the grain and the wheat and divide the chaff from the good stuff.

And guess what he would do sometimes? He would stop and he would eat. What he's doing? Well, they would put a muzzle on him because there goes some profit, there goes some more profit, there goes some more. And the people were so worried about the profit from the wheat or the barley that they would actually muzzle the ox and wouldn't allow the ox to eat the food that he was actually treading, benefiting from his labor.

So Paul's setting up a principle here that those often in the ministry, at least full-time ministry, should benefit or should have their pay come from the ministry. Personally, I've never liked the concept. My dad taught us, you know, we work hard, we work hard by our hands.

And I've often come from that construction background, so it was a real hard transition for me to be at the mercy of the board, for example. I don't pick what my pay is. I actually can't vote on any of that.

The board of directors says, here's what the standard is in the churches, our area, take into population what you're doing and the amount of people that come, and they set a standard that is average, the average there for that. And then that's what I submit to. But there are still people.

I'll still get people saying, you know, you should go to work, pastors should never get paid. And I'm like, I can do that, I'd love to do that, I'd probably make a lot more money in real estate. But you can't do both

effectively.

You're like, well, if I'm all, I have to be a good employee at this other job, and I can't go and minister to people to the level they need it, so you have this going back and forth. So this is the concept where people get the idea that people on staff full-time are actually paid from the ministry. And that's how it's set up, at least in this structure, is the board allocates the salary, and if there's any other compensation at all.

Verse 12, nevertheless, we have not used this right. In other words, Paul says, I can, but I'm not. We have not used this right, but endured all things, lest we hinder the gospel of Christ.

So Paul says, I can receive for the ministry, but I'm not going to, because I'm gonna not hinder the gospel of Christ. Verse 14, even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. So if a person's heart is right, and they're in the work of the ministry, and they receive from the ministry, and they're not, you know, building this mansion, and Corvettes, and you know, just, I mean, it's just basic living.

They live off what they're doing. But he is saying here, don't charge for the gospel. Don't charge for the gospel.

For example, someone asked me, different areas, speaking engagement, they often say, what do you charge? And I say, to preach, I'll pay you. You think this is a joke, but I would give Joel Steen \$100,000, if I had it, to preach from that pulpit, and reach the millions that he reaches with one message, and that message would be turned to back to God, and repent. Can you imagine? Can you imagine the millions, and millions, and millions of people who would hear that? They'd be the fastest clicking off their TV you ever saw.

Nelson ratings, Nelson ratings would drop, but God would get the message out to those who need to hear it. So I, back when I very first started, I would let people know, I don't have, you know, I don't have a price. I will come there, and if there's a budget for it, if God leads you to do it, that's fine, but I'm not coming with the understanding of receiving anything.

And that's, that's been working ever since last 18 years or so, and that's, it's kind of, I'm not gonna say, oh yeah, I'll come out there for a certain amount, you know. Now, it gets, there is interesting, you know, there's, there's so much here on this topic, but let me just get to verse 16. There's a lot of verses.

I'm not getting through all of them, as you can see, if you're following in your Bible, because there's so much there, and they're actually, Paul's actually saying the same thing. Verse 16, so Paul just said, nevertheless, I can get paid from the gospel, but I'm not going to get paid because I'm, I don't want to hinder the gospel at all whatsoever. So woe is me, because he's saying, I don't want it to be hindered.

Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. Woe is me. Now, this is so funny, or not funny, but the irony is this.

Many people read that, and they don't quite understand it, and it's, it's very, very few people can understand this, because it's an internal call. If you've ever had that call of God upon your life to preach the gospel, you actually can't do anything else but preach the gospel. I can try to get another job, but the magnet is pulling me back to the gospel.

I can try to run from it, but Jonah, he's pulling you back. Woe is to me if I do not preach the gospel. I have to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It's an internal burning. It's an internal, like Jeremiah, his word is in my heart, like a burning fire. It's shut up in my bones.

I'm weary of holding it back. I can not, and that's why I love that song. I'm just a nobody trying to tell everybody about a somebody who can save them and set them free, because when God called me, and he calls other preachers, he puts this, the power of the Spirit in them.

He says, this is what I've called you to do. I've anointed you to do, so you can put handcuffs on. You can go sit somebody in a boring job, but the heartbeat is, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel, and that's what he's saying there.

For example, you know, Pastor Abram just was hired full-time. Go ask him how it was just sitting at a desk for 12 hours or 10 hours at a secular job, when it's woe is me to preach the gospel. It's like you're crawling out of your skin.

I'm sitting, I wasn't designed to do this. I wasn't created to do this, and that's the advice I give to young pastors. I said, well, Shane, I don't know.

Should I pastor? That's an email we get a lot. I don't know if I'll call to the ministry. Am I going to call to the pastor? I don't know.

What should I do? And I said, well, here's what C.H. Spurgeon said in his lectures to students. It's a good book you should read for those interested in the ministry. If you can do anything else, do it.

I'm going to tell my kids that, believe it or not. If you can do anything else, do it. Well, that doesn't make any sense.

Yes, it does, because if you can do anything else, you weren't called to the ministry. And the ministry without the calling of God will kill you. Why is it what you see all these pastors in the news, highest suicide rate in pastors now.

They said one of the most stressful jobs. You can Google this. Don't Google most things, but Google it.

They're one of the most stressful jobs in America. Guess what's on the top five, like with the president of the United States? A pastor. What? How is that possible? So many anxiety, panic attacks, burnout, running from the ministry.

Were you truly called? Now, I'm not saying all those things aren't a challenge. They are. But I remember hearing even Pastor Chuck Smith talk about this.

He said, I've never had to take a year sabbatical. I've never been burned out. I've never been... And he's not gloating in that.

What he's saying is, it's what I was created to do. It's what God has called me to do. And if you have the safeguards up, you have a Sabbath.

You have boundaries. You focus on just what God's called you to do. Not all these other things.

Because you know, everybody thinks pastors should be the gardener, the janitor, the family counselor, the finance person, the CEO, the children's ministry director. Handle this issue. If you can, prepare sermons.

If you can, if you can get around to that. The chauffeur... And there's a whole... It's called unrealistic expectations. But in Acts, we actually find out, the Apostle's saying, we need to find deacons to go help those in need because we're called to the ministry of prayer and preaching and teaching.

Here's how it works. I go hospital homes. I'll get a text.

I'll be in a convalescent home in 30 minutes. And I'm loving all... But if that's all I'm doing and I come up here, I will have nothing for you. Nothing.

That's why we have others and that's why I'm actually... A pastor is to equip. We have a lot of people sitting in this audience who can do hospital ministry, mills ministry, mentoring, discipleship. I'm amazed often at the number of people who are retired.

Just got home with the Netflix. And they want the church to go mentor somebody. Hey, I've got a neighbor here.

I think you really like to be met. How about you? How about you? You got an extra 50 hours a week, buddy. But they throw it... And some of that's good because I've met people like that.

And I just drove yesterday to Northridge to meet with a person about marriage, helping their marriage. And so we're called to do that. But if it begins to take away from the primary calling... And that's why we have to have boundaries.

And that's why we can't always make every function. And people sometimes get upset. Why didn't you come to the baby shower? The baby this or the present or birthday or the party or the wedding? And you just can't.

And if you try to take all that on, which we did early on, you'll become very stressful. And you're trying to please everybody and you feel like you're letting people down and you forget. Okay, God, here's what you call me to do.

Now, what else can I squeeze in there? But let me just get this main focus done with in my life. So that's what Paul is dealing with. And he said here, when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.

Without charge. Being sensitive to the influence of others. That's what he's saying.

You have to be sensitive to the influence of others. Now, there are speakers who actually make their living by traveling and speaking. I'm not talking about that.

Anytime, it has happened recently, but a lot of times when we offer something in the lobby, we sell something in the lobby, people say, hey Shane, Matthew, Jesus ran out the money changers. I'm like, well, the context is that they were taking advantage of the people. A \$5 book was being sold for \$50 because they needed the book.

See, that's the wrong attitude. But to offer a good resource at a great price for those who would like it is there's nothing wrong with that. Because you're helping people.

Unless you have a million dollars laying around and you can pray for the printing and the shipping and the cost, let us know. But if not, there sometimes has to be a cost on something to help absorb it. So what's a practical application for this first point of uncovering motives? Paul was sharing his heart.

Well, it is this. Your main motivation. Is your main motivation money or recognition or success? What is your motivation? It's really to check our motive for getting into ministry.

Why do people get into ministry? Are they coming to church to meet a girlfriend or a boyfriend? Or to build up their downline? Did you know that's an issue a lot of big mega churches have? Is that certain professions will go there because of the downline. Is a real estate agent gonna go to church of 5,000 or 50? 50 if they're solid, thank you. But if they're looking for a downline, a lender, stockbroker, and our motives, why do we go to church? I've had people tell me, I would come to your church if you serve coffee and donuts in the back like the other churches.

Where we could sit and enjoy our coffee and donuts. Well, I don't know what to tell you. You have to want to, there's pictures of people like standing in water at church while their village flooded because they want to still worship God.

Sitting on dirt floors and just being so appreciative of God. And then he goes into verse 16. I'm sorry, I already did that one.

Woes me if I do not preach the gospel, the practical application. And then the second point, here it is, relating to the culture. So Paul is actually going to tell us to relate to the culture.

But Shane, I often thought you said, don't relate to the culture. What are you talking about? Well, here's the key. Two words, just change the A and the I, kind of spelling of this word.

Are you affecting the culture? Or is the culture infecting you? That's the big difference right there. Christians are to be the salt and the light, to go in and affect the culture around them. But if they start to become what they're supposed to affect, see, that's the problem.

See, what happens is many people go in and they, okay, I want to relate to the culture and I want to affect the culture. And they end up going to the new movie Joker with their friend. Or they start listening to the wrong things.

If you don't know what that is, that's good. It's straight from the pit of hell. And see, now they're part, now they look like the culture.

So the church, even when the church is in the culture, it should not look like the culture. And Paul says right here, for though I am free from all men, in verse 19, for though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win them all. That is so important.

I am free from all men. I don't have to, but I've made myself a servant. Did you catch that? Not a leader, not above, but he's a servant to all men.

Have you ever heard of the Dream Center in Los Angeles? Tommy Barnett, I believe, planted that church or took it over. And then his son, Matthew Barnett, he was, we came to Los Angeles before this time, and he wrote this. He came wanting to succeed in ministry.

That's not a bad thing, necessarily. But God told him this, I don't ever want you to talk or even think about success again. Numbers.

Oh, the church isn't growing. We're not succeeding the way the world looks at it. He said, think about being a blessing.

Success is obedience to your calling. I have called you to bless these people. Love them, heal them, help them, serve them.

Then there was a pause as I absorbed that thought. Then came this closing argument. I love these people.

If you reach the people that nobody wants, I will send you the people that everybody wants. But he was so worried about, and many times in ministry, they can be worried about success. For example, if you start a Bible study at your home and it's down to three people, well, this must be a failure.

Is it really? Is it really? I can take you to a big Bible study in Lancaster where they're doing wine tasting and trying the new IPA beer out every week. Oh, you can have big groups. But where's the faithfulness with the right heart? Verse 20, and to the Jews I became as a Jew that I might win the Jews.

To those who are under the law as under the law that I might win those who are under the law. To those who are without the law as without the law. To the weak I became weak that I may win the weak.

I become all things to all men that I might be by some means save them. Now this I do for the gospel sake that I may be a partaker of it with you. So becoming all things to all men.

It's like even pastoring. You could wear a suit and tie to a certain audience, but another audience, you might want to put on some sweatpants. If you're not in a homeless shelter, victory recovery.

You're going to a recovery group, but also the upper echelons of a community, and you're being all things to all men. That's what Paul, he wasn't, oh, I'm the solid Jew. I'm not gonna talk to you.

Jews weren't actually allowed to dine with Gentiles, and so I'm gonna be all things to all men, not compromise. But here's where I have to be careful. If a person becomes too strict, you know there are some churches that are too strict, they won't fellowship with other churches because they're too carnal, too worldly.

It's like it becomes a cult because all about keeping this safe little spot here. But Paul even says here, we go out and we affect the culture. So if you go, for example, if I went to Harley-Davidson, I might dress a little bit different and talk to the guys and understand where they're coming from, or if I've got to go, which I'm doing, to Anaheim or Beverly Hills to be a fundraiser for a big Christian organization, and there's people there in the staff that aren't Christians in the hotel, and you talk to them, you relate to them.

You're being all things to all people. You're not compromising the gospel. You're relating to them, because if not, what happens? We walk in with a better-than-you approach.

We walk through Lancaster while suit and tie with my head hung high. I'm not looking at you people. I'm just called to minister to the PhDs, not you lowly people.

But Paul's saying, no, that's not true. We have to minister to all people in all areas of life. So what's the practical application? Be solid in the essentials, but also full of love and grace.

Be solid in the essentials, but also full of love and grace. You know, I should say something on that. I wrote an article, The Legalist versus the Compromiser.

Neither is right, and we see that in the church sometimes. The pendulum can swing one way or the other. The compromiser, which is sometimes referred to as the Las Vegas Christian, is at the other extreme.

They don't honor God by their lifestyle. Are you even a Christian? You look just like the culture you're supposed to be affecting. It sounds like the culture is infecting you.

And it's like, yeah brother, but it's all about love and grace. No, that's just an excuse to continue in your destructive lifestyle. But then the other side is the legalistic side.

All rules, no relationship. And what I wrote about the legalistic side is this, in their effort to highlight obedience to Scripture, which is good, right? The legalist often loses balance. They contend that they are passionate and have strong convictions, but that statement is often as an excuse.

It's good to be passionate, but our motives should stem from not from self-glorification or self-righteousness. Our motives should stem from a broken, humble heart wanting to help people. So another practical application would be this, remove the plank from your eye first before critiquing others.

And then here's the third point, the power of self-discipline. Uh-oh, who's about ready to yawn and go get lunch? Go eat something you know you shouldn't be eating because self-discipline is lacking. Quiet here in this place.

But this would actually, I wish I could do a whole sermon on this because the longer I live, the more I realize how important this is. The power of self-discipline. What is that word? Where does it come from? Disciplining self.

And we're teaching one of our youngest kids right now is when you can't just do things that are fun. It has to have self, you have to do things you don't like to do. Do the hard things.

Why? Because then you're building self-discipline. Does Paul have anything to say about that? Well let's see, maybe I'm wrong here. Verse 24, do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Okay, so now he's, think about this, your Christian walk today is being being matched with or paralleled with a race.

So here's how you have to look at the Christian life that you are involved in right now. Do you know or do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? So here's what Paul says, get at the back of the line and just take it easy. Oh, did I miss that part? Let me see.

Run in such a way that you may obtain it. So Paul's saying here's this race, only one gets the prize, take off all the weight, all the things that ensnare you, the sin, the things that are pulling you down, and you run that race to not only finish well, but you run to win. And that requires a massive amount of self-discipline.

Ask any Olympic athlete how important self-discipline was. I guarantee you will never hear one person say, not at all. Not at all.

You just lifted the most weight. How did you lift all that weight? I don't know, I just watch TV all day and just God's gifted me. His morning begins early with the proper nutrition.

It actually began the night before with the proper sleep. The proper sleep, you get the proper rapid eye movement. Your body begins to rejuvenate and heal itself.

The muscles that he just worked out the day before are restored. Not during the workout, they're actually restored during the sleeping based on the macronutrient contents of the food that he took in the night before as well. All this to get up in the morning with enough sleep, not put something in a system that's dangerous, and then he's going to go out, he's going to work those muscles again.

Probably all sorts of muscles when it comes to the weightlifting. You've got to have strong quads, calves, back, core stabilization training, shoulder training. He goes into the training, one body part and then the next.

But Shane, I don't have time to do all that. No, but parallel it with the Christian life. Same exact parallels.

From what we eat, to how we sleep, to how we function, to how our day is prioritized are all set to winning that prize. It's part of self-discipline. And so he said here, and everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things.

Now we don't use that word temperate much anymore. What do we say today? Moderation. Moderation.

There's a moderation. So he who competes for the prize is going to be temperate in all things. He's using moderation because to get outside of moderation means now I've lost self control.

Isn't that what that means? Now it's okay if I have a donut once a month, that's okay. I don't want to be convicting here. But if I start having three a day, which really sounds good, and I'm out of moderation on that, what happens? I begin to feel the effects of that and I begin to lose that race, slows down.

Or what about sin? What about sin? Something that is fine in moderation, outside of that moderation, can become sin. So those who are winning the prize are temperate in all things. But I like what he said here.

They place a high value on winning. We forget that in Christianity because sometimes we feel like, well, we're just passive, kind of along for the ride, waiting for Jesus to return, kind of taking it easy. I got my 401k.

But the image I get, at least from Paul's life and the biblical texts, is they place a high value on winning and finishing the race strong, setting their eyes on Jesus. Wonderful allegory. Have any of you read *The Pilgrim's Progress*? I think you probably have because it's the second highest-selling book behind the Bible, still in print after 400 some years.

The allegory of it is he's got his eyes, there's the gate, there's the light, I see the light, and he's got all these things, worldliness coming in and discontentment, all these things coming to get him. And he says, and the guy says, Christian, just keep your face on the light and on the cross and just keep going no matter what comes against you, no matter what trials, no matter what things, no matter what attacks, you stay focused on the narrow gate. So see, that's what winning the race is.

I see the prize and no matter what comes, it hits, and you're knocked, and I don't care, I'm still going that direction. That's winning the Christian race. Paul gives us allegory or examples of being a soldier, of being

an athlete, and being a farmer.

Those are your options. If you didn't know that today, that's who you are. As a believer in Jesus Christ, you better sit up straight in this room this morning because you are a soldier.

You are a soldier. You are an athlete. I don't like working out.

It doesn't, guess what? It doesn't matter if you like working out. You don't have to necessarily work out physically, but spiritually. You're a soldier, you're a farmer, and you are an athlete.

We have to redefine our thinking. So they continue, their eyes are set on the prize, not the problems. They are moderate and control the restraining self.

Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown. So Paul is saying, I remember reading, it was probably 25 years ago, it always stuck with me. They interviewed this man who was taking steroids to win in the Olympics.

You know what happens, right? A lot of these guys, the rock just doesn't look like the rock just because he's got good genetics. I'm gonna get in trouble here, so I'll be quiet. But I actually just ran in on our trip.

I ran to a guy who placed high in the Mr. Olympia. He's like enormous, but at least they admit to some of this stuff. But anyway, I'm getting off track here.

Let me bring this back. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we have an imperishable crown. For ours is an imperishable crown.

In other words, look at what they're doing. Oh yeah, so I'm gonna tell you the story. They asked this guy, the steroid you're taking, is it worth it if you die in four years? And the guy said, yes, if I win that gold medal.

That's true. That's true. Now why do those things kill you? Well, long run, I mean Arnold Schwarzenegger's doing good, but in the long run what they do is, depending on if you're taking growth hormone, just for your own information, you actually add muscle cells, and you get the big jaw and the big feet like Neanderthal because you're putting growth hormone into your system.

Or steroids, what they do are cell volumizers. They pump up the muscle cells, and guess what? Your heart's a muscle, and also your liver has to digest things called antivar, anadrol, decadirabolin, all these things that you're putting in, your liver now has to cleanse all these drugs from your system. So it's very hard on the liver, it's very hard on the kidney, it's very hard on your skeletal system too, because you were not designed to carry around 300 pounds and lift 800 pounds.

So your joints are taxed, so it's very taxing and hard on the body. But athletes do it to obtain what? A crown that is perishing. I thought about this on my drive here, it just kind of broke my heart.

All the people you like, many of you watch The Rock, or you like, what's that guy, his little buddy? What is it? No, not Vin Diesel, Kevin Hartman. Is that his name? Okay, them. I mean, and you look at these guys, but if they're perishing, we should be praying for them.

So they're obtaining, look it, they've made it, they've arrived. Oh, I sat by this star at the restaurant. They're perishing for a crown that dies.

They're going to, you can't take any of that with you when you go. And so we get so focused on this crown that is perishing. But Paul said, remember, your crown is not perishing.

Therefore, I run this way, Paul says, not with uncertainty. So we're not running with uncertainty, confusion. I don't know where this life leads.

I don't know where you go when you die. We're running with certainty. This I fight, not as one who beats the air.

Here we go. Here goes a convicting verse. But Paul says what? But I discipline my body and I bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

So at the end of all this, he says, I discipline my body. You know, I've noticed over the years, those who don't like me talking about this, call me a moralist. He's just hardcore.

He's a legalist. Anytime they don't like what the Bible says, they put the term legalist on it. No, it's just biblical to say discipline yourself.

Paul didn't. Well, where's scissors at? Let me cut this part of the Scripture out. Anybody have scissors? I discipline my body and I bring it into subjection so I can be an example for others.

J.C. Ryle noted this, that holiness will cost a man his sins. He must be willing to give up every habit and every practice which is wrong in God's sight. There must be no separate truths with any special sin which he loves.

Holiness comes with a price. There is a cost. Death to self and crucifixion to the world.

This is so hard in the American church to preach this topic because we're so blessed and our blessing has become our curse. Holiness will cost the opinions of men. Did you know that? As soon as you step out and saying I'm living for God, I'm gonna be holy and set apart, I'm gonna watch, be careful with what I view, be careful of how I live, that holiness will cost you.

It will cost you a great deal. How about being ridiculed, mocked, slandered, persecuted, even hated for taking a stand for holiness? But that's what an athlete does. So here's a practical application.

What areas are lacking in self-discipline? What areas in your life are lacking in self-discipline? Well, what exactly are you talking about, Shane? It's actually very easy. What area has God been convicting you in to take back under control? There's a conviction, I've got to get this area under control. Or it goes something like this, I really need to stop doing that.

I need to take back authority in my life in that area. That's a positive discipline. God just says, come on back.

We've all been there. We've all fallen off the discipline train. Actually, life kicks you off every day because what is our body? Is our body just by predisposition, by design? Is it designed to go towards discipline? I had a nightmare the other day.

If I just let my body do whatever it wants, can you imagine the ramifications? Can you imagine? I would be dead by tomorrow. All the lusts, all the passions, all the desires, it just wants to do it. So self-discipline, and I wish I could have done the whole sermon because it's so important.

I see so many people just being hurt by their health or by circumstances because of not disciplining self. There's a song that I heard this week. The lyrics go something like this, the weapon may be formed, but it will not prosper.

When the darkness falls, it will not prevail because the God I serve knows only how to triumph. My God will never fail. Oh, my God will never fail.

I'm gonna see a victory for the battle belongs to You, Lord. Every war He wages, He will win. I'm not backing down from any giant because I know how this story ends.

I'm going to see a victory. I'm going to see a victory. See, you have to remember that God is always with you.

That's why I love that story in Daniel. Do you remember the three boys who would not bow to the king? They said something that's so important for us today. They would not bow to the king.

And the king said, you must bow to me. And they said, they stood before the king and said, we will not bow to you because our God will deliver us from the fire. Is that faith? Hold on, no.

But even if He doesn't. See, that's the part we forget as Christians. But even if doesn't, if God doesn't answer the way I thought, I will not bow to you.

And many of us, if we're not careful, can have God on that first condition. Oh, God's going to deliver me through this. Oh, yes, He is.

And when He doesn't, we become bitter. We become upset. We begin to drift from God.

He can, but will He? They said, we will not bow to you, king. And what happened? They threw him in the fiery furnace. They threw him in there.

And the king said, what is that? There's another in the fire. There's a fourth person in the fire. And there is someone like in the Son of God in the fire with them.

See, that's what you have to understand. Even in the fire, even in the storm, even when the floods come and it beats upon your house, even when the marriage is crumbling and your kids are ejecting, even when California is going crazy, they've lost their mind. The United States of America has drifted from God.

You look, what is going on? There is a fourth man in that fire and He is holding you. He is sustaining you. He's seeing you through that.

Oh, God, deliver me from this culture. Deliver me from this city. Oh, God, it's terrible.

But even if you don't, I'm going to stay and I'm going to fight until you return. We're going to do business until you return. Even if they come in someday and say, young man, for the words you're saying, you're going to jail.

God, you'll deliver me. But even if you don't, even if you don't, you better live your life that way, folks. In these dire times, you better live your life that way.

God will protect me. He will deliver me. I'll never see what they see in the persecuted church.

I'll never be confronted with a gun. I'll never be beheaded. God will deliver me.

But even if He doesn't, and I'm convinced the direction we're going, we're going quickly. We need to prepare our kids for that. Prepare them for love and joy and peace and the abundant life of Christ.

But also prepare them that the world does not. Do you see whose people are running for president? I think I'm in the twilight zone. How in the world did this happen? Let's clap for that, man.

Praise God. I mean, I don't care what side you're on. It doesn't matter.

I'm just saying we've lost our mind. We have lost our moral compass.

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