

LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

9 ²⁴Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but [only] one receives the prize? Run in a way that will assure you of winning the prize. ²⁵Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training, they do this in order to win a perishable crown, but we [do so in order to obtain one that is] imperishable. ²⁶For this reason, I do not run like someone who has no goal, I do not box like someone who is [merely] beating the air. ²⁷On the contrary, I beat my body and bring it into submission, so that, after having preached to others, by no means will I myself be disqualified. **10** [I say this,] brothers, because I do not want you to disregard [the fact] that all our fathers were under the cloud and they all passed through the sea. ²And they all were baptized into Moses by means of the cloud and the sea. ³And they all ate the same spiritual food. ⁴And they all drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them—that rock was Christ. ⁵However, God was not pleased with most of them; [this is evident] because their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

⁶Now these things were examples for us, intended to teach us not to have evil desires, like they had. ⁷Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and then got up to indulge in [pagan] revelry.” ⁸Let us not engage in sexual immorality, as some of them did; and in one day twenty three thousand [of them] died. ⁹Let us not test the LORD, as some of them did; and they were killed by the snakes. ¹⁰Do not grumble, as some of them did; and they were killed by the destroying angel. ¹¹Now these things happened to them as examples [for us], and they were written for our instruction—[for us] upon whom the end of the ages has come. ¹²Therefore, let the one who thinks he is standing [secure], be careful not to fall. ¹³No temptation has seduced you except the kind that is experienced by all men. But God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to bear; on the contrary, along with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, so that you may be able to endure it. (1 Cor. 9:24-10:13)

Introduction

“Numerous indicators suggest that rather than adhering to a Christian philosophy of life that is occasionally tarnished by lapses into infidelity, many Christians are profoundly secularized, and only occasionally do they respond to conditions and situations in a Christian manner.” (p. 136)

“Christians must be challenged to increase their commitment to spiritual growth. Perhaps too often the ministry of the church stresses evangelism at the expense of discipleship. Recent converts and mature believers alike need to continually grow in their spiritual life; stagnation brings spiritual decline. Churches need to take seriously the business of edifying the flock, just as individual believers need to reaffirm their commitment to becoming Christ-like.” (p. 146)

The preceding quotations are taken from the book, *Vital Signs* (by George Barna and William Paul McKay; Crossway Books, Westchester IL; 1984); a book based on the

studies and national survey information gleaned by two Christian researchers. Their research indicated that the contemporary American church is very much comparable to her first century Corinthian counterpart. The Corinthian Christians—focusing almost exclusively upon their Christian liberties—were in serious danger of being swallowed up by the pagan and licentious culture in which they found themselves.

As was true with regard to those first century Christians; there is today, also, an urgent need for us to live the Christian life. Because the Lord is not tolerant of sin, we may not be complacent about it; on the contrary, we must earnestly endeavor to live the Christian life.

I. Live the Christian Life, by Imitating the Athlete in His Dedication (9:24-27)

Turning to the subject of self-discipline in the Christian life, the Apostle Paul illustrates the place and necessity for such discipline by pointing us to the athlete. Paul exhorts us to exert “a winning effort” in our Christian life: *“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but [only] one receives the prize? Run in a way that will assure you of winning the prize”* (1 Cor. 9:24.) There is a place and need for effort in the Christian life. Jesus exhorts us, *“Do not work for food that spoils, but [work] for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you”* (Jn. 6:27.) The Apostle Paul exhorts us,

Therefore, my beloved ones, just as you have always obeyed, so now—not only in my presence, but much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who is working in you both to [create the] desire and to [produce the] work for the sake of his good purpose. (Phil. 2:12-13.)

There is a place and need for endurance in the Christian life. The Lord Jesus declares, *“he who endures to the end will be saved”* (Matt. 24:13.) The writer of the Book of Hebrews exhorts his hearers:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ²Let us focus our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:1-2)

In verse 25 Paul points out how the athlete subjects himself to a rigorous program of training and self-discipline with the hope of **possibly** winning *“a perishable crown.”* How much more should we as Christians subject ourselves to the discipline of Christ with the sure hope of obtaining *“an imperishable crown”!* Note: Whereas the athlete relies upon self-effort; we as Christians have the divine

resources of the grace of God and the person of the Holy Spirit, note again Philippians 2:12-13,

Therefore, my beloved ones, just as you have always obeyed, so now—not only in my presence, but much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who is working in you both to create the desire and to produce the work for the sake of his good purpose. (Phil. 2:12-13)

In verses 26-27 the Apostle Paul, for his own sake, (as well as being an example for us,) applies these things to his own life. *“I do not run like someone who has no goal;”* rather, he sets his sights on the goal—here is purposeful Christian living focused upon Christ, note again Hebrews 12:1-2 referred to previously. Some common forms of distraction that attempt to divert our focus from Christ would include such things as our jobs and careers and the manifold types of recreation available to us.

Paul goes on to testify, *“I do not box like someone who is merely beating the air. ²⁷On the contrary, I beat my body and bring it into submission.”* While we must be gentle towards others, the Lord exhorts us to be ruthless with regard to our own sins:

If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off, it is better for you to enter into life maimed, than to have two hands but go to hell with its unquenchable fire. ⁴⁵And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter into life crippled, than to have two feet but be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; it is better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than to have two eyes but be thrown into hell. (Mk. 9:43-47)

Our Lord is not giving us here a literal command, but rather is graphically calling our attention to the need for us to be ruthless and utterly intolerant with regard to our sins. He does not mean for us to take these instructions literally, for instance, if we were to cut off a hand to restrain it from sinning, we would still have another hand with which to sin and have no means of cutting it off.

Let us live the Christian life, by imitating the athlete in his dedication. As Christians, we must recognize and take seriously the fact that we have been called to be Christ's disciples. The invitation extended by our Lord in Matthew 11:28-29 contains a call to discipleship: *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”*

By way of illustration, we are not called upon to compete in these spiritual “Olympics” alone, we are called to surrender ourselves to Christ our Savior as He supplies His winning performance for us and applies His victory and grace to our lives.

II. Live the Christian Life, by Taking Seriously the Warning Contained Israel's History (10:1-12)

In verses 1-4 of chapter 10 the Apostle Paul enumerates the spiritual privileges of Old Testament Israel. *"All our fathers were under the cloud and they all passed through the sea;"* that is to say, the whole nation enjoyed the divine presence and protection of the LORD, and all were brought safely through the parted waters of the Red Sea. *"They all were baptized into Moses by means of the cloud and the sea;"* the whole nation was sacramentally identified with Moses, the servant of God and the divinely appointed redeemer. *"They all ate the same spiritual food ... they all drank the same spiritual drink."* The whole nation was sustained in the wilderness by the food and drink the LORD miraculously provided for them; note that divinely provided food and drink is seen as being an Old Testament parallel to the New Testament sacrament of communion, which represents the spiritual sustenance we receive from Christ. *"They drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them—that rock was Christ."* Here Paul is referring to the incident recorded in Exodus 17:5-6,

Jehovah said to Moses, "Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the River. Now go. ⁶I will stand before you there by the rock at Horeb. You are to strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. (Ex. 17:5-6)

Paul is looking beyond the physical rock from which the water flowed to the Divine Provider who stood above that rock, and he identifies that Provider as Christ—Christ Himself was ever present, protecting Old Testament Israel and providing for them.

Despite the privileges and blessings they received, verse 5 declares, *"God was not pleased with most of them—their bodies were scattered in the wilderness."* The same God who so graciously provided for them also struck them down when they abused and despised His grace. The fact that their bodies were *"scattered in the wilderness"* emphasizes the fact that they did not attain their final destination, namely, the Promised Land of Canaan.

According to verses 6-11, the experience of Old Testament Israel in the wilderness provides us with examples that we are **not** to imitate.

They forsook the worship of the LORD and practiced idolatry (vs. 7.) The temptation to participate in pagan idolatry was a real issue for the first century Corinthian Christians—the ancient practice of idolatry is once again becoming a real issue for Christians in the twenty-first century. By way of example, North American and European Christians find themselves inundated by New Age spiritism, a modern form of the ancient paganism. Another, more subtle, form of

idolatry of which the New Testament speaks is materialism and covetousness, as Paul warns the Ephesian church, *“of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or covetous person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God”* (Eph. 5:5.) Our Lord Jesus declares, *“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money”* (Matt. 6:24.) Anything or anyone that occupies the place of pre-eminence in our lives instead of the Lord Jesus Christ, is an idol and a form of idolatry.

They indulged in sexual immorality (vs. 8.)

They tested the LORD by questioning and denying His goodness and by longing to return to the things they left behind in Egypt (vs. 9.) We do the same whenever we entertain the spirit exhibited by Job’s wife and refuse to accept Job’s perspective. After Job encountered suffering despite his life of devotion to the LORD, his wife gave him this counsel: *“Are you still maintaining your integrity? Renounce God and die!”* (Job 2:9.) But Job rebuked her with his reply: *“You are speaking like one of the foolish women. Shall we [only] accept good from the hand of God, and shall we not accept calamity?”* (Job 2:10.) Job trusted in the goodness of God, despite his inability to presently understand the workings of God in his life.

They murmured against the LORD, rebelling against Moses whom He had appointed to be their deliverer (vs. 10.) We do the same whenever we resist the lordship of Christ and set ourselves contrary to His will for our lives.

Verse 12 issues a warning against presumption—the false confidence that we are standing secure, and therefore, do not need to be concerned about our moral and spiritual well-being: *“let the one who thinks he is standing [secure], be careful not to fall.”* The Corinthians were confident that they had attained spiritual maturity, and they were tempted to assume that they were immune to God’s judgment no matter how they lived. Therefore, they had need of the warning issued in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, *“Do you not realize that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor those who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.”*

Let us live the Christian life, by taking seriously the warning contained in Old Testament Israel’s history. The example of Old Testament Israel should instill within us a sense of humility, watchfulness and carefulness, and godly fear, as the Apostle Peter informs us, *“if you call upon the Father who judges impartially according to each one’s work, live your remaining time [on earth] in [reverent] fear”* (1 Pet. 1:17.) True biblical assurance and confidence are never divorced from Christian responsibility, note Jude 1 and 21, *“Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who are called, beloved by God the Father, and **kept***

for Jesus Christ ... ²¹keep yourselves in the love of God." True biblical assurance and confidence are never allowed to degenerate into spiritual and moral laxity. From the biblical perspective, the Christian's assurance becomes a reason for godly activity, not an excuse for ungodly behavior.

III. Live the Christian Life, by Relying upon Our Faithful God (10:13)

Verse 13 provides the assurance of God's divine oversight and assistance in our struggle against temptation and in the time of trial: *"God is faithful."*

God's faithfulness assures us that we will never be overmatched when we encounter temptation or trial, *"He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to bear."* The degree or the duration of the temptation or trial is suited to the level of our spiritual maturity and designed to further develop that maturity. Furthermore, the degree and duration of temptation or trial is never more than the degree of grace the LORD is willing to dispense. By way of example, Abraham was not asked to sacrifice Isaac until he had first attained a high level of spiritual maturity and had successfully encountered previous tests, increasing his confidence in the LORD and His all-sufficient grace. Note: This assurance does not pertain to the times when we foolishly expose ourselves to temptation, or the times we are permitted to suffer the consequences of our own folly. Proverbs 14:16 informs us, *"A wise man fears [Jehovah] and turns away from evil; but the fool is arrogant and careless."* Or again, as Proverbs 22:3 declares, *"A prudent man sees the evil and hides; but the naive keep right on going and suffer for it."*

God's faithfulness assures us that He will provide *"the way of escape."* Note that the passage does not say the LORD will provide a way of escape "so that you may avoid the trial;" it says, the LORD will provide a way escape *"so that you may be able to endure [the trial]."* The emphasis is not upon the avoidance of trial, but upon the successful endurance of trial for our spiritual growth unto the glory of God, as Peter informs those Christians who were facing severe trial:

... now for a little while, since it is necessary, you have been brought to grief by all kinds of trials. ⁷[This has happened] so that the genuineness of your faith—being of greater value than gold that perishes—having been tested by fire, may be verified, resulting in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. 1:6-7)

Let us live the Christian life, by always relying upon our faithful God. Whatever the trial or temptation, we can look to the LORD to provide the means of grace that is necessary and appropriate. He will prove faithful to provide us with light and understanding when such is our need: *"you will light my lamp; Jehovah my God will lighten my darkness"* (Psl. 18:28.) He will prove faithful to supply us with courage and strength when that is what is required: *"with your help I can advance against a troop; and by my God I can scale a wall"* (Psl. 18:29.) He will

prove Himself faithful to be our Refuge in the time of trouble: *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”* (Psl. 46:1.) He will prove faithful to supply us with the grace of endurance when that is the need of the hour: *“Cast your burden upon Jehovah, and he will sustain you”* (Psl. 55:22.) He will prove faithful to provide the provisions that are necessary for us: *“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus”* (Phil. 4:19.) He will prove faithful to provide for our safe departure into glory at His appointed time: *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me”* (Psl. 23:4.)

Conclusion

We dare not be content with a superficial Christianity, which is no true Christianity at all. We must commit ourselves with whole-hearted devotion to Christ our Savior—He is worthy of nothing less and He will accept nothing less. By the grace of God, let us heed the admonition of Scripture that we live the Christian life.