

Missional Metaphors Pt. 2, Running To Win, 1 Corinthians 9:19-27

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"You can't commend what you don't cherish. Missionaries will never cry out, 'Let the nations be glad!' who cannot say from the heart, 'I rejoice in the Lord...When the passion for God is weak, zeal for missions will be weak."

John Piper

Intro

What would constitute a "Win" in your life? I am all about winning in anything I do. Life for me is a competition. Unfortunately that doesn't always end in godly actions and attitudes. A lot of our desire to "Win" is based on a desire to "make a name for ourselves." It has become one of our idols, and we are manic and willing to put all other things away in order to achieve. But our passage reminds us to run our lives in such a way in order to "Obtain it," or as the NASB says, "That you may WIN!" We are called as "Athletes" to discipline ourselves and act in accordance with the reality of who we are in Christ.

I am reminded of Jesus' words in Matthew 13 when He says what the kingdom of Heaven is like. In verses 44-46 we see that the "Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure in the field" and "Like a merchant seeking fine pearls." In both instances the user sells all he has to gain it, because of the value and the "Joy" that they bring. At first it appears that both of these ideas have no real connection point, but I think that they do. It is easy to get caught up in the churches call to be missional, and see that as our salvation and joy. Whereas, I do think that serving God does bring forth joy, we need to be reminded that this joy is secondary to the true source of our joy; Jesus Christ and the Trinitarian God!

I think that the two short parables in Matthew remind us that the kingdom that we are a part of in Christ is valuable and our source of joy because it is there that our King reigns! As our passage last week showed us, we are therefore ambassadors of the reality of the kingdom we have been grafted into through the cross of Christ. In that sense, we are called to "Do" the work of Christ in this world, and run that race in order to win, but it cannot be divorced from the fact that our identity and treasure are solely in Him, and not in the fact that we are "Disciplining" our self for the mission of God. Therefore mission is the result of our new identity, not the means of our new identity, but it is the natural response to the gospel in our lives when we begin to understand the gospel implications on our lives and the life of the church.

Our passage today is in the context of a pluralistic culture, and Paul's desire to reach that culture. It gives us a sense of how we are to reach those that may be different from ourselves.

From the Head...

Running In Order to Win (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

I am starting with the end because it emphasizes our "Missional Metaphor," and because it emphasizes the fact that we are aiming at something. There is purpose for what we are called to do, and that calling demands a sacrifice for the sake of the call.

Then sport metaphor is apt for Paul in his context since Corinth was the location of the biennial Isthmian games (Second only to the Olympics). It is possible that Paul's stay in Corinth during his second missionary journey (**Acts 18**, AD 49 Or 51) overlapped with the games. The sport metaphor is also apt as a "Missional Metaphor," since successful athletes most often combine two realities in order to be successful; love of the game, and hard, disciplined work. The latter is the result of the former. While we cannot emphasize the discipline without the former, it is imperative to realize that mission involves intention, focus, discipline and vision. It is love that motivates us, but it is focused, intentional work that moves the mission. The writer to the Hebrews also uses a similar metaphor in **Hebrews 12:1-3**.

Putting Aside The Self For the Prize (1 Corinthians 9:12b-18)

Clearly the issue in this context is Paul's priorities. One of the ways he "Disciplines" his body, is that he is willing to forgo his own rights for the sake of the gospel. Any great athlete is endowed with the ability to make his teammates better. Putting aside personal goals for team goals is the hallmark of greatness. This is not what defines Paul, since he is compelled to preach the gospel (**v. 16**), but because of the gospel working in his own life, he is willing to put himself out, for the sake of others (See **2 Timothy 2:10**).

Becoming All Things To All Men In Order to Win Some (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

Becoming all things in no way means compromising our identity in Christ, nor does it mean in-authentically trying to be something you are not. It simply means that as missionaries to the culture, we need to use the means that best displays God's glory in a culture. We are ready to set aside and sacrifice our own culture in order to speak to another one. We are called to intentionally identify with those around us in order to try and reach them for Christ.

It is interesting that Paul says, “*I became as a Jew,*” when in reality he was a Jew (**2 Corinthians 11:22; Galatians 1:13; Philippians 3:5**), and in no way denigrated his Jewish lineage (**Romans 9:3-5**), but Paul saw himself as something greater than his national/racial identity. In Christ he had a new identity that we all have, which sees no distinction between the Jew and Gentile (**Acts 15:9; Romans 3:22; 10:12; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:13-14**). It is imperative that our identity is in the fact that we are a new person in Christ Jesus (**2 Corinthians 5:17**), and because of that, we can become like those around us, because we are not bound by our nationality, race, personality, gender, socio-economic background, etc. Christ isn’t an “Ism” or cause, but the creator God of the universe, and the author and perfecter of our salvation.

In order for us to “Become” like those around us, we’re going to have to intentionally get to know and understand the culture, and the people surrounding us.

... to the Heart

I believe that when we truly understand the gospel, our hearts will desire what He desires. Mission will never save you, nor make you in better standing with God, but it is a way of life when we begin to grasp the God who saved us. We are all growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we all have different levels of conversion to Christ’s mission in the world, and with that we cannot judge one another’s calling, however, when God gets a hold of our heart, we can’t help but convert to His call to be on His team, doing all we can to win the race He has set before us.

It is our heart’s desire that leads us to mission. As John Piper writes, “*You can’t commend what you don’t cherish. Missionaries will never cry out, ‘Let the nations be glad!’ who cannot say from the heart, ‘I rejoice in the Lord...When the passion for God is weak, zeal for missions will be weak.*” I pray that God grabs your heart, and your love for Him consumes you as a person before you ever venture into mission out of guilt or duty!

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