

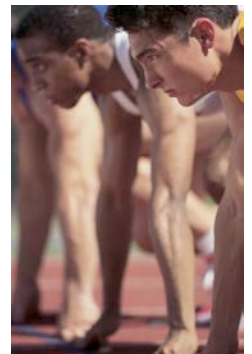


Warnings Concerning Disqualification (1 Cor. 9:24-10:13)

Paul has been writing about the need to give up rights so that a Christian brother will not be discouraged in his faith; and then he shows that he has given up rights that belonged to him as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Now he moves to the very real possibility of falling away as Christians and gives Old Testament examples of those who lost their faith in God. All this is still within the context of the problem of eating food sacrificed to idols.

I. It is Possible to be Disqualified as a Christian (9:24-27)

The example of running in a race is one that the Corinthian Christians would have clearly understood. Throughout the Roman Empire, sports were popular and Corinth was no exception. In fact, just outside the city of Corinth every two years the Isthmian Games were held. These sporting contests were second only to the Olympic Games in ancient Greece. It is probable that Paul was in Corinth at the time of the games as they were held in April/May A.D. 49 and 51.¹



In an athletic competition not every contestant wins; in fact in most events there is only one winner. The point is not that to live as Christians, others must lose, but that it is possible to fail and not receive the victor's prize. In fact, Paul said that he himself had to discipline his body and keep it under control lest he be disqualified.

To win the race required the athlete to exercise self-control or go into strict training. Each participant in the Isthmian Games was required to train for ten months. The word translated as athlete in the NIV is the Greek word *agonizomenos*; in other words the competitor agonises through the difficult training. Self-control is needed to endure the training program and to be ready for the contest. This idea is a continuation of the thought in the preceding verses of voluntarily giving up one's rights.

1. What are some ways in which athletes must practice self-control if they hope to win?
2. What are some ways in which Christians must practice self-control if they hope to win?

In verse 27, Paul says I discipline my body and I keep it under control. Some groups have taken this verse to mean that Christians should inflict pain upon themselves, or practice asceticism, but that is not the idea that Paul is trying to stress. Paul continues to use athletic metaphors to say that he rigorously works to control the impulses of the body, and does only those things that will keep him from being disqualified in the Christian race.

¹Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome. *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002. p. 15.

The word translated as “disqualified” refers to a person “who for whatever reason was not permitted to compete in a contest.”² In this case, the race is the Christian life, the prize is heaven, and disqualification would mean eternal hell.

The illustration of running aimlessly is that of an undisciplined runner and the boxer who beats the air is one who doesn’t land blows against his opponent. This indicates a futility in a flawed effort in the competition. To win the Christian prize requires:

1. Being present in the race v. 24
2. Purposeful running v. 24, 26
3. Self-control v. 25 (self-denial or giving up one’s rights)
4. Effort aimed toward the goal of an imperishable prize v. 25
5. Disciplined effort vss. 26-27

3. **Does working for the Lord mean we cannot be disqualified? Support your answer from verse 24.**

II. Examples from Israel’s History (10:1-13)

4. **Why are the Old Testament examples recorded for the Church? (10:6,11)**
5. **Does the church today pay enough attention to the truths found in the Old Testament? Explain why you answered this way.**

The word translated in 1 Cor. 10:6 as “examples” is the Greek word *typoi*. Paul shows four examples or types of behaviour that can be seen in the Corinthian church. Each of these activities led to disastrous results for Israel and what the Israelites did was a type of what was going on in Corinth. Specifically Paul lists four actions.

1. They were idolaters (vs. 7)
2. They were sexually immoral (vs. 8)
3. They tested the Lord (vs. 9)
4. They grumbled (vs. 10)

6. **How many times is the word “all” used in verses 1-4 and why is this significant?**
7. **Who are the fathers in verse 1? Whose fathers are these people? (Rom 4:11; Gal. 6:16)**



8. **How is baptism similar to the crossing of the Red Sea? (vs. 2)**
9. **What did God provide for the needs of Israel in the desert? (vs. 3, 4; Ex. 16-17)**

²Smith, James E. *Teacher’s Commentary: The Encounter Epistles 1 & 2 Corinthians*. Lulu, 2010. p. 153-154.

The Israelites walking across the Red Sea on dry ground is a type of baptism. With the cloud above and the waters on each side the Israelites were surrounded by water. Stepping into the water required faith, but refusing to step into the water would have assured death. The water separated the Israelites from the Egyptians while baptism separates the believer from the world. The ancient Israelites were baptised into Moses as they recognised him as their leader and submitted to the Mosaic Law. Christians are baptised into Christ and recognise him as Lord.

Jesus was with the Israelites in the desert (showing he existed before Bethlehem) and that he followed them and provided for them. Still with all these blessings the Israelites complained, many turned to idolatry, and most died in the wilderness. These events as well as the following ones from Israel's history serve as examples for the church.

10. Paul was the Israelites “desired” or lusted after evil. What does this mean?

Verse 7 tells us that some of the Israelites were **idolaters**. They sat down to eat and drink as they “participated in a feast in honor of the idol, the golden calf.” Here they ate the food sacrificed to the idol. They got up to drink and rose up to play. The idea of playing was their “wild, naked dances that concluded the feasts to the idol.”³



In verse 8 some of the Israelites were **sexually immoral**. The penalty in one instance for their immorality was that twenty-three thousand died in one day (Numbers 25:1-9). In Numbers we find that twenty-four thousand died. How do we handle the apparent discrepancy? Paul writes about how many died in one day where Numbers does not say one day, so most must have died on one day with others dying a day or more later.

The next example found in verse 9 is that of those who **put Christ to the test**. The Corinthians were testing him by their conduct. The Israelites tested him by their sinful lifestyle and lack of thankfulness. In Numbers 21:5,6 venomous snakes came and killed many.

The final example in verse 10 is that of **grumbling**. The reference to grumbling is probably from Numbers 16 where 14,700 died in a plague. This plague was caused by the destroyer who was God's agent to punish the wicked.

Again Paul repeats that these things happened as examples. They are recorded in Scripture of the benefit of God's people. The end of the ages is the last period of history; that is the church age or the time between the resurrection and the second coming of Christ.

11. Explain the warning of verse 12.

12. What lessons do we learn about temptation in verse 13?

God's people are warned that it is possible for them to be disqualified or rejected and lose their eternal reward. This is demonstrated by the destruction that came upon the Israelites in the Old Testament when they engaged in idolatry, sexual immorality, putting the Lord to the test, and grumbling. All these sins were present in the Corinthian church. These warnings should motivate them to change and they are encouraged that God will never put upon them more than is possible to overcome.

³Reese, Gareth L. *New Testament Epistles: 1 Corinthians*. Moberly, Missouri: Scripture Exposition Books, 2004. p. 337.