

The Normal Christian - Disciplines Their Body

1 Corinthians 9:23-27 [New King James] *“Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you. 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. And everyone who competes for the prize is **temperate in all things**. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”*

Paul introduces himself as a servant, [Greek word translated “servant” is “*dōulōs*” meaning bond slave] of Jesus Christ, as the whole Church has been purchased by Jesus Christ’s sacrificial blood, [Acts 20:28].

Paul also includes the members of the Corinthians Church in the work he is doing for his Master the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul then likens this work they are doing for Jesus Christ to a long distance race. To run such a race a person has to be fit both physically and mentally.

Paul also likens the Christian life to a fight to maintain the mastery of his body.

It is as a preacher of the gospel message as a Christian worker that Paul approaches this problem of control, and in the interests of the gospel message he seems to solve the problem.

Like any competitor in a sport, self-discipline is essential for all who are competing.

What may be normal for any who are not participating in the race may not be allowed during the training period.

There are also stringent rules that must be adhered to, otherwise we will be disqualified.

To be “temperate in all things” means that our bodies must not be allowed to make excessive demands, its liberty has to be curtailed in the area of food, drink, clothing or sleep.

Our body is there for just one reason, to run the race and gain the prize.

If we have not yet brought our body under such control, we need to begin right away, for we can be of little use to the work that Jesus Christ wants us to share with Him if our life is dominated by physical cravings.

May I ask a personal question?

Are you the master of your body, or are you a slave to its demands?

Does your body submit to your orders, or do you give way to its desires?

Your body regularly demands sleep and that demand is legitimate.

God has divided time into daylight and night to provide humans the opportunity to rest, and if we disregard this divine provision we will not do so with impunity.

On the other hand, if we allow our body to govern and lets it sleep whenever it feels so inclined, it will become too soft and sluggish to work.

When the Lord Jesus Christ's interests require it, we may have to reduce our normal 8 hours of rest, or even forego sleep altogether for a night, we have recorded such an occasion, [Matthew 26:36-44].

If we are to be prepared for such an occasion as the disciples experienced we must constantly keep the body under control so that it becomes inured to hardship.

What does it mean to run a race?

It means doing something exceptional. Normally we walk along gradually, step by step, but in a race we quicken our steps so our body is called upon to put forth extra effort.

Jesus Christ laid bare the trouble, “*the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak.*”

What is the good of having a willing spirit if our body is impotent to do what the spirit wills?

The body must not be an encumbrance, but it is a servant that needs training in order to serve well. This training has to be under normal circumstances so that it is ready to meet the demand of exceptional circumstances.

Nicodemus came to Jesus Christ at night so that he would, as a Pharisee, avoid the other hostile Pharisees. Despite the lateness of the hour Jesus Christ was prepared to allow His ministry to encroach upon His sleep, and we must be prepared to do the same, [John 3:1-8].

It is recorded that Jesus Christ had on occasions spent the whole night in prayer.

The same principle applies in the matter of eating and drinking. Under special circumstances Jesus Christ abstained from food, but He ate well when there was no call for abstinence, His body had to obey His mind.

It is recorded by Mark that at one time Jesus Christ was so in demand by the multitude of needy folk that He had no time to eat, [Mark 3:20].

Jesus Christ waived His own physical needs for the time being because of the pressing needs of the multitude.

If we can never forego a meal when the work demands our immediate attention we will do little effective work for our Saviour Jesus Christ.

The Word of God states plainly that Christians should fast when occasion requires.

Sometimes a special need calls for prolonged prayer that leaves no leisure for food. When we meet a situation that will **not** yield to prayer that is unaccompanied by fasting we must temporarily refuse to grant the body's rational demands.

Another demand of the body is comfort. We dare not find fault with a worker for enjoying a measure of ease when circumstances permit. **What we should deplore would be inability on a worker's part to respond to the call of work if the comforts they are accustomed to were not provided.**

We will be able to adapt to circumstances of great discomfort when they come if our body has been brought into subjection beforehand.

As for clothing, it could not command undue attention.

Some Christians, alas! have set themselves too high a standard in the matter of clothing, and insist on always conforming to it.

It is not glorifying to our Saviour and Lord to wear disreputable garments but we should, whenever possible, be clean, tidy and suitably dressed.

This same principle every aspect of our life including sexual desire.

Paul covers the subject of marriage in **1 Corinthians 7:1-40**, and includes the option of remaining unmarried because of the person's total involvement in the work given to them by Jesus Christ, [verses 28-35].

Philippians 2:5-8 [New King James] *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”*

What can we say when our Saviour and Lord denied Himself the uttermost glory and stooped to the depths of shame and suffering for every human being?

For love of Jesus Christ our Saviour shall we not command our bodies to serve us so that we can serve Him unhampered?

Romans 8:11 [New King James] *“But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”*

It is through the active indwelling of the Holy Spirit that we can control this body we have and ensure it is fit for serving our Lord and Saviour.