

**HOW TO WIN**  
**1 Corinthians 9:19-27**  
Message 1525

Surely only the foolish or lazy would not plan or hope to win. It seems incredible that anyone would simply plan to loose. Whether in business, sports, or everyday life, the idea is to win, to come out on top. Most people do it for financial or personal reasons.

In the field of religion, especially Christianity, the central drive is to win others. Christianity is an evangelistic faith. Several times Jesus sent out evangelistic teams. Once He sent out the twelve; on another occasion He sent out seventy. They went by two's to preach the Gospel, to witness, and to testify. His closing commission to the disciples was in Galilee. It was a "GO." "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). So we can confidently affirm Christianity is *more* than a private experience.

From letters we have received from overseas listeners, we know full well there are some who are secret believers. But that is not the normal situation. Many who write to us from our international audience after conversion say, "Now I must tell others." "Send a Bible to help me." Or "Send me some literature." Or "Send me some tracts." "Help me, teach me, guide me, because I want to be a witness for Jesus." One who wrote said, "Now I must avenge Satan for keeping me in the dark for 20 years."

So our purpose is to make clear to you what the Good News is! And I want to affirm before you that the Good News is the *same* that it has always been.

The great golden text of the Bible is still just as true as it was when Jesus spoke it: "God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have ever lasting life." That is John 3:16! And friend, we can tell that around the world, and it meets the need of every human heart that seeks for peace. Amen!

To find out further what our driving force means, I turn to I Corinthians 9:19-27:

*19 For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.*

*20 And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;*

*21 To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.*

*22 To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.*

*23 And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.*

*24 Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.*

*25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.*

*26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:*

*27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*

In this text the apostle Paul finds several WAYS to prepare the believer to win converts to Christ. The first way is

### MAXIMIZE YOUR EFFORTS

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Here are four different groups the apostle Paul refers to. He says, "I became a Jew." "I became as one under the law." "I became as one without the law." "I became as one who is weak." To communicate with them, to somehow bring the message of the Gospel to them, Paul saw the need to identify with them. We can be absolutely sure that the apostle Paul never compromised his faith or his message. But he went among these four different groups to bring them to a knowledge of the truth. That was what he concentrated on. He concentrated on the truth.

The Gospel is still the same. John 3:16 is still as true as it was in the day Jesus spoke it. And human need is the same. We have so many people talking these days about change, change, change. Everything is in flux. But I want to assure you, my friend, some things are still the same. There is only one way of salvation. There is only one Son of God. There is only one sacrifice for sin. It has always been that way in the mind of God. There is no change. He does not change.

What about the adaptations? I remember well a conversation I had with a friend of mine. He saw what we are doing in terms of our international broadcast to three-quarters of the world. We have letters from 176 countries.

He asked me, "What adaptation do you make?" I made it very simple. I said, "None." We do not change the message. We do not have the right to change the message. The message has been given. But some people are very much concerned about what they call contextualizing the Gospel. The contextualization is the fact that the human race all over the world is in need of the Gospel. And it is the same Gospel—No modification, No adaptation, No change. It is the same. That is how we reach out to all people. We don't make any difference whether Jews, Gentiles, Muslims, Chinese, Japanese, whoever, wherever. The message is the same. So we are trying to Maximize Our Efforts and get the message out to all people everywhere.

The second way the apostle Paul describes is

#### CENTRALIZE YOUR ENERGY

*24 Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.*

*25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.*

Paul uses a very interesting illustration. He is talking about, you might say, the Olympics of his day; that is, the stadium, the races, and the contests. Well, we are in a marathon race. Hundreds are in the race. Some are simply running for the sake of running. The apostle says, "Aim for the prize." He said, "In a race they all run, but only one receives the prize." But he then suggests very clearly that every one of us has possibilities of getting the prize. "So run that you may obtain." It makes no difference whether you are running behind or ahead of me. When we are in the race for Jesus, we aim for the prize. We stretch every nerve to win.

Some years ago my wife and I had the privilege of living in Greece for a while, and I went to the University of Thessalonica. I was staying in the hospice there with the male students, and one of my friends invited me to come along to field day. He provided me with a ticket. I went and sat in the bleachers. There were not many people there for this field day, but I was observing what was happening. I do not know which race it was, but a number of runners lined up for the race. One fellow who was rather heavyset soon lagged behind. He lagged behind farther and farther and farther. Finally he gave up, walked off the course. They actually applauded him because he realized he would never win anyway.

That is not the case Paul speaks of. He says, "Run so you may obtain." To do that, there has to be some training. There has to be some effort to be temperate in all things. Be careful not to overdo anything. Aim to excel!

While this is very appropriate and proper in the sports field, it certainly is proper in the religious field. Aim to excel! Hone your skills as a Christian! Keep your face in the Book! The psalmist said, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doeth he meditate day and night" (Psalm 1:1, 2). So while you are centralizing your energy, hone your skills as a Christian.

Every four years when there is an Olympics, scores of people who plan to enter the Olympics subject themselves to vigorous training. They train every day. They push their bodies as far as they will go in the field of their choice, to try to get their muscles strong and their balance and everything else just right. Now that could apply to the Christian walk. Centralize Your Energy!

I have received great blessing from Barnes on this point:

Can a man be truly earnest in his professed religion; can he be a sincere Christian, who is not willing to abandon any thing and every thing that will tend to impair the vigour of his mind, and weaken his body, and make him a stumbling-block to others? The value of temperance is here presented in a very striking

and impressive view. When even the heathens wished to accomplish any thing that demanded skill, strength, power, vigour of body, they saw the necessity of being temperate, and they were so. And this proves what all experiments have proved, that if men wish to accomplish much, they must be temperate. It proves that men can do more without intoxicating drink than they can with it. The example of these Grecian Athletae their wrestlers, boxers, and racers, is against all the farmers, and mechanics, and the seamen, and day-labourers, and gentlemen and clergymen, and lawyers, who plead that stimulating drink is necessary to enable them to bear cold and heat, and toil and exposure.

So, my friend, let nothing interfere with your central purpose. I appeal to you. I am speaking to you as a Christian. Centralize Your Energy!

The third way the apostle Paul describes is

#### ORGANIZE YOUR EFFICIENCY

*26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:*

*27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*

Focus on the necessary. The apostle says, “I do not run uncertainly.” So run with purpose. I would like to say that in the Christian walk the course is laid out. You see we are not trying to find the way. We are walking in the way. It is the narrow way Jesus told about. He said, “The way is narrow and straight” (see Matthew 7:14). That is where we are. We do not have to find our way. It is already laid out. Remember that Southern spiritual song: “On the Jericho Road, there is room for just two, Jesus and me”? That is right. You cannot take a lot of people with you, but you can walk with Jesus. So focus on the necessary and run with purpose.

Furthermore, fight with determination. I was just trying to imagine what Paul was referring to when he said, “I do not fight as one that beateth the air.” I am not a fan of the boxing ring. I don’t have any particular desire to see men knock each other out. But they had boxing in Paul’s day. And not with padded gloves! But how stupid it would be for a man simply to aim at nothing, to fight as beating the air. He would expect his swing to end on his opponent, not in thin air. Be careful to direct your efficiency correctly, so that you hit the target.

Keep your body in control. He said, “I keep my body under.” He does not pamper his body. He does not listen to the appeals of his sinful flesh. So use personal discipline. Take charge. Do not be pushed around by what you might desire in your less spiritual moments. It has often been said, “What you do shouts so loud I cannot hear what you say.” So keep your body in control.

And then, oh what a challenge that last phrase is! “When I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” Practice what you preach. You know, the present is always our challenge. The past is gone forever. The future is yet to come. So all we can deal with is the present. Therefore we ought to concentrate and give ourselves to the present. With diligence we can make every move and every minute count for Jesus. That is what this is all about.

How shall we win a few? Paul says, “That I might by all means save some.” That is the whole purpose and focus of HERALDS OF HOPE, INC. That is what “The Voice of Hope” is for. I am hoping now that I am challenging you to give your life to Jesus.

If you are a Christian, then I call you to

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