

Beware of Your Competitor: The Body

No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. **—1 Corinthians 9:27**

We are all in a race—are we are trying to outdo one another? No. Not at all. In this race every single one of us can receive that prize. So our competition, Paul says, is our bodies. He says, “I beat it and make it my slave.” The word slave is the translation of the Greek word *doulos*.

Paul is not meaning here that we get to heaven because we beat our bodies black and blue, but according to Paul we could miss the prize if we do not. And the prize was very important to him. So he regards his body as a slave of the spirit.

Behind Paul’s thinking are three principles. First, Paul knew that being an apostle, being a preacher, did not guarantee him the prize. In fact, according to James 3:1, it makes it worse. So the higher profile you have, the greater gift, the more you are called to do, the harder it is to get the prize.

Paul knew also that God is no respecter of persons and therefore will not bend the rules for anybody. Now if there were ever a soul whom you would think God would bend the rule for, it was the apostle Paul. Look at the way he suffered. Surely that ought to move the heart of God to say, “Well, Paul, because you have worked so hard, when it comes to the prize I’m not going to be so strict with you.” But it is the opposite.

And last, Paul knew his greatest competitors were not his fellow Christians—but his own body. Like Paul, we ought to be aware that our greatest competitor is not our fellow Christians but our very own bodies. In other words, it is

possible to be a success as a preacher, but that success could be under a cloud, not because the preaching lacked eloquence, or truth, or converts, but because of a failure in personal holiness.

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