

# Running and Fighting Lawfully

*“I therefore so run,  
not as uncertainly;  
so fight I, not as  
one that beateth  
the air.”*  
—*I Corinthians 9:26*

**PAUL, LIKE JESUS,** employed many illustrations in making clear the Word of God and its application in the Christian life. In our text and in the immediate context

he uses two illustrations: one, of running in a race, and the other, of fighting or the equivalent of what today would be called a boxing match. His lesson is that just as there is a right and wrong way to run a race or to fight in a boxing match, so there is a right and wrong way to serve God and to live the Christian life. Paul affirms his determination to “so run” and to “so fight” that he would be assured of victory. In verse 24 he admonishes us also: “So run, that ye may obtain.”

In the illustration of the runner we have emphasized the importance of giving total attention to the one thing at hand. This is true with the runner of a race not only during the comparatively short time of actually contending on the racetrack, but also during the much longer period of training for

the development of both speed and endurance. If one is to be victorious, he or she cannot afford to expend large amounts of time and energy with other things no matter how alluring or attractive they may be. Runners must be ready and willing to make any sacrifice necessary in order to do their very best. This may mean that during the training period they cannot eat what they might prefer to eat, but must keep strictly to a diet that is best suited to develop their physical strength and stamina. Runners must also be temperate in all things, forgoing certain luxuries and pleasures in which others might properly indulge. They must discipline themselves in all necessary ways to assure that at the time of the race they will possess the maximum degree of strength and endurance which is required to win.

When runners finally enter the race it must be with the determination that nothing will be permitted to stand in the way of the best performance possible. Before reaching the end of the racecourse they may feel tired, but there must be no yielding to the temptation to slow down or to take it easy. Every ounce of strength, every nerve, every muscle, must all be utilized for the one purpose of winning the race. Only thus could it be said that they so ran, as to obtain.

It is just such an undivided and uncompromising effort that Paul admonishes us to put into living the Christian life. In writing to the Philippians Paul expressed a similar thought saying, "This one thing I do." (Phil. 3:13) Today the world often describes this attitude as an all-out effort. For Christians to "so run" simply means that they exert the maximum

effort possible to make their “calling and election sure.” (II Pet. 1:10) If there is any holding back, any half-hearted endeavors, any efforts short of the very best we can make, we may not gain the victory for which we seek. Rather, as Paul admonishes: “Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them.”—I Tim. 4:15

## **PAUL’S APPLICATION OF THE LESSON**

The apostle’s admonition to “so run” follows a revealing of his own attitude and determination with respect to his service to the Lord. In I Corinthians 9:4-6 Paul wrote: “Have we not power to eat and drink [what we please]? Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?” Obviously both Paul and Barnabas needed to eat and drink in order to live. It is equally plain that the apostle is not criticizing his fellow apostles because they were married. His lesson seems to be that material and domestic things should not be permitted to unnecessarily interfere with our service to God.

The material side of life must be given proper consideration, not in the sense of making it the primary objective of all our efforts, but rather in order that we might utilize even the material things to further our spiritual interests. This becomes apparent in the 6th verse where Paul says, “Have not we power to forbear working?” Reading on through the chapter we learn what he means by this question. He points out both by reason and from the Scriptures that as a servant of the Gospel he had

the right to obtain his material living out of that service and thus to “forbear working.”—vss. 7-13

It could be reasoned that this would be ideal in that it would give the apostle his whole time and strength to devote to God’s service. However, Paul had another way of looking at it. He would devote practically all his time to the direct service of the Truth and the brethren—that is, he would make full use of all the opportunities available to serve in spiritual things. In addition to this, though, he would work with his hands to provide for his own food and clothing.—Acts 20:34

By a careful study of Paul’s words, there appears to be two reasons why he decided upon this course so far as his work in Corinth was concerned. He reasoned correctly that he would have more influence for the Gospel if no one could charge him with making his living out of it. Besides this, he felt that it would be better for his own spiritual welfare if he did not pamper his flesh by taking it easy between the occasions he served the brethren, by allowing them to feed and clothe him.—I Cor. 9:15-19

Paul was doubtless well aware of the evils to which such a temptation could lead. If the church supported him, it would be more difficult to preach the Word of God uncompromisingly to them; and conditions in the church at Corinth called for an unbending presentation of the Gospel and its proper application in the Christian life. Probably the opportunities for service were such under those circumstances that it did not detract from them in any way if Paul spent a certain amount of time in his occupation as a “tentmaker” in order not to depend upon the brethren for support.—Acts 18:1-3

In this lesson we get a close-up view of the real character of the great Apostle Paul. “I therefore so run, not as uncertainly,” he declares. (I Cor. 9:26) That is, there was nothing uncertain about what he intended to do, nor about the sacrifice he was willing to make in order to do it. He was happy to serve the Truth and the brethren, but if he took things too easy while thus serving, his flesh might someday become the dictator of how he should serve and what he should preach. Rather than to take this chance, Paul stated, “I discipline my body and to bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”—vs. 27, *New King James Version*

Paul disciplined his body by making it do double duty, as it were. He served the church in spiritual things, and then, instead of permitting them, as was his right, to provide for his temporal needs, he put his body to work to provide his own temporal necessities. He did this to make his ministry to others more effective, and also to make sure of conquering any tendency towards selfishness or love of ease. He knew that no matter how effectively he preached to others, if he did not discipline himself, his efforts would be like one who runs “uncertainly,” lacking direction.

## **CIRCUMSTANCES VARY**

Probably not many of the Lord’s people today are confronted with problems similar in detail to those described by the apostle. The value of this lesson, however, is in the manner in which Paul applied divine principles in meeting his unique situation. Even if Paul had decided it would not have

been best for him to spend time making tents, his approach to the matter would have been the same; that is, it would have been an unselfish approach. The deciding factor was not how he would be benefited according to the flesh, but what would be the best for the brethren and best for his spiritual welfare. His flesh was on the altar to be sacrificed, and it made no difference when, or by what means, it would be consumed.

In Paul we have an example of a victorious runner in the spiritual racecourse, a runner who permitted nothing to interfere with his victory. To what extent are we following his example? Are the decisions we are making of the sort that will result in the disciplining of our bodies, or the kind that are calculated to make it easy for the flesh? Each decision of the former kind is a step toward victory, while the latter represents a yielding to the desires of the flesh and a consequent slowing down of our speed along the racecourse toward the goal—the “mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 3:14

### **“SO FIGHT I”**

The illustration of the fighter is equally to the point in that it also emphasizes the necessity of self-discipline, application, and energy. In this connection Paul explains that “every man that striveth for the mastery [Greek: compete for a prize] is temperate in all things.” (I Cor. 9:25) The word “temperate” here has the thought of self-control. Victorious Christians are those who exercise self-control; that is, they endeavor to bring all of their thoughts, words, and deeds into line with the one great objective of

their consecrated lives. They endeavor not to permit any of their energies to get out of control.

Intemperance is often closely associated with intoxication. Christians should find it necessary to be on guard against the intoxication of pleasure, love of ease, worldliness, pride, selfish ambition, and other influences which would draw away from the “one thing” which they have undertaken to do, which is that of laying down their lives in the service of God.

There are also more subtle forms of intemperance. One might become intemperate in prayer, in Bible study, in witnessing for the Gospel, or in fellowshiping among the brotherhood. One might be intemperate in using the typical lessons of the Bible, such as the Tabernacle and its service, or in the study of Revelation. If the Lord had wanted us to devote nearly all of our time to one or two features of his Word, he would not have revealed so many other things to us, as he has so graciously done. Intemperance along any otherwise proper Christian line eventually results in an unbalance of Christian character—an unbalance which could easily display headiness and pride on the one hand, yet spiritual weakness and lack of development on the other.

The Christian’s enemies consist chiefly of the world, the flesh, and the devil. To successfully strive against these we need to have on the “whole armour of God,” not just a part of it. We need the “helmet of salvation,” representing an understanding of God’s Word. Head knowledge alone, however, no matter how accurate it may be, will not protect us against our enemies. We need the “shield of faith,” and the “breastplate of righteousness,” but these without the other parts of the armor will not fully

protect us, no matter how well we may have them polished.—Eph. 6:13-17

When face to face with the enemy we will need the preparation of prayer and of study and fellowship. However, prayer alone, or study alone, or fellowship alone, will not properly equip us for the warfare. The spiritually strong, wholesome, and growing Christian is the one who makes proper use of all the divine provisions of grace, not an over-use of one to the neglect of the others. Like the fighter or runner in training who must watch his diet, his rest, his exercise, and his recreation, in order to be in proper training; so we must be temperate in all things, using in proper balance all the provisions the Lord has made whereby we may grow strong in him and in the power of his might.—vs. 10

## **STRIVING LAWFULLY**

In II Timothy 2:5 Paul draws another lesson from the fighter illustration. He says: "If a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully," that is, according to God's law. This thought carries us even beyond that of being temperate. It indicates the possibility of fighting in unlawful ways. The Christian is under God's law, not that which was given to Moses at Sinai, but a new law, or "commandment," enjoined by Jesus upon all his footstep followers. The simple statement of that law is, "Love one another; as I have loved you." (John 13:34) Jesus laid down his life for us, hence we are to lay down our lives for each other. This means that our lives must be motivated by unselfishness, implying that we would rather die ourselves than do anything that would injure others.

It means that the interests of others lawfully come ahead of our own. If our striving is out of harmony with this principle, it is contrary to the law given by Jesus, and unless we become law-abiding we will not receive the crown of life.

The application of this principle touches every detail of Christian endeavor and searches out the most secret motives of our hearts. Jesus, in his sermon on the mount, mentions some of the details. There he tells us: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you." (Matt. 5:44) Earlier, in verses 38-40, the Master says: "You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also."—*NKJV*

There are few things that stir up the indignation of the flesh more quickly than to feel that one's just rights are being trampled upon. Jesus' rights were trampled upon when he was arrested, falsely accused, and crucified, but he yielded to the injustice and redeemed the world. We profess to be following in his footsteps. Are we striving lawfully in this respect?

## **ELEMENTS OF LOVE**

Other details of what it means to strive lawfully within the limitations of the divine principle of love are brought to our attention in I Corinthians, chapter 13. Here we are told that love "suffereth long." (vs. 4) This means that it is unlawful for the Christian to be other than longsuffering and patient

toward others. Love is also “kind,” the apostle adds in the same verse. Do we realize that it is unlawful for the Christian to be unkind in his dealing with others? How do we measure up to this requirement?

Love “envieth not,” Paul continues in verse 4. Are we envious of others while we strive to make our own calling and election sure? If so, we are not following the divine rules of the contest. Our motives must be pure and unselfish. If we are envious of others, selfishness is still in our hearts, and if it is not purged out we will not be victorious in “the race that is set before us.”—Heb. 12:1

Love “vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.” (I Cor. 13:4) The first of these elements of unlawful conduct on the part of a Christian reveals a desire to shine before others—to be “seen of men.” (Matt. 6:5) The latter is that of thinking too much of one’s own abilities and importance. In Romans 12:3, Paul speaks of it as thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. Both of these elements of selfishness and pride are unlawful for the Christian. If we are unselfishly laying down our lives to the glory of God, we will not want to make a display of ourselves before others; nor will we have a “puffed up” opinion of our own importance.

Love does “not behave unbecomingly.” (I Cor. 13:5, *Weymouth New Testament*) This, apparently, is a reference to intemperate behavior, and might manifest itself in any of the ways already suggested, and along other lines as well. It is simply another way in which our fallen flesh may manifest itself, and if not properly dealt with may cause us the loss of victory. The Lord wants each of his people to be part of the brotherhood of Christ, and thus to lose

the importance of one's own individuality while contributing to the welfare of all, and to the glory of God. To be a hobbyist, an extremist, or a rugged individualist, or in other ways to call attention to self, is unbecoming behavior for a Christian, and represents unlawful striving for the mastery.

“Love seeketh not her own.” (vs. 5) If it did so, selfishly, it would cease to be love, for love is unselfish. If our Christian striving is in the interest of self it is unlawful, and if we continue in such an attitude we will not reach the “mark for the prize of the high calling.” How many times friction develops within the brotherhood which would not have occurred if there were no seeking of selfish interests, no desire to protect our so-called rights. May the blessed implications of this rule of the contest sink ever deeper into our consciousness and more thoroughly control our behavior. “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 2:3-5

Love “is not easily provoked.” (I Cor. 13:5) The meaning of this is that love is not stirred to anger. It has no occasion to be. People get angry when things do not go the way they want; but true Christians are not interested in having things go their way. They want them to go the Lord's way, and they know that nothing should be allowed to interfere with his perfect will. So, while we should make every proper effort to do what we believe would be pleasing to the Lord yet, if our understanding of his will is thwarted by others, we will accept it, not as “disappointment,”

but as “his appointment,” and use it as a stepping-stone to greater trust in the Lord and in his providences for us.

Verse 5 concludes by saying that love “thinketh no evil.” This does not mean that Christians close their eyes to wrongdoing, either in themselves or in others. It does mean, though, that they do not surmise nor attribute evil where there is no proof that evil exists. It means that true love will induce us to think good rather than evil whenever and wherever possible. If we find ourselves habitually thinking evil of one or more of the Lord’s people, without undeniable proof that evil exists, then we may know that we are striving unlawfully. Hence, we cannot expect the fullness of divine blessings that we might otherwise be enjoying, and it will be necessary that we make the needed correction to our character.

Love “rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.” (vs. 6) This is a wonderful touchstone to test the true condition of our hearts. Do we enjoy those things which are not in line with God’s justice and truth and love, or do we abhor such things, and rejoice in the Truth, and all things that are in harmony with it? What are the sources of our habitual rejoicing? Let us make sure that they are those things which are pure and noble and of good report, so that our striving for the mastery will be lawful. —Phil. 4:8

Love “covers” all things. (I Cor. 13:7, *The Emphatic Diaglott*) It was God’s love that provided the covering of Christ’s righteousness for us, and it is because of this covering that we stand justified before him. (Isa. 61:10; Rom. 5:17,18) This same covering of

love in our own hearts should enable us to cover over the imperfections of our fellow brethren in Christ. It is along this line that Jesus taught us to pray, “Forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.” (Luke 11:4) The example of God’s love in this as well as along all other lines, is the perfect pattern for us. Let us strive lawfully by seeking to cover the imperfections of others rather than expose them.

Love “believeth all things.” (I Cor. 13:7) This does not mean that love believes evil rumors that may be circulated about another. It does mean that love believes the professions of others unless confronted with undeniable evidence that those professions are wrong. Love also believes all the promises of God—the promises to supply grace and wisdom and strength in every time of need in our fight against the world, our flesh, and the Adversary. By believing these promises we will not resort to human wisdom and human tactics in order to gain the victory. To do so would be striving unlawfully.

Love “hopeth all things,” Paul continues. Being ever hopeful, with expectation of divine providence and overruling, love enables us to rejoice in every experience. Hope pertains to that which we do not now possess, and love enables us to discard present advantages and present joys in order that we may lay hold more firmly upon the hope set before us in the Gospel, the hope that is centered in Christ. With such a hope we can say with the apostle: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not

seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”—II Cor. 4:17,18

Love “endureth all things.” (I Cor. 13:7) Some things are easy to endure, but others are difficult. The difficult things are often those which run counter to the desires of the flesh. If we are treated unjustly, that is hard to bear. If we are ridiculed by family or friends because of our stand for righteousness, that may also be hard to bear. If we are called upon to suffer physically, that will likely be painful and difficult to tolerate. No matter what it may be, however, love endures all things because love is unselfish. Love does not compute values from the standpoint of self-interest nor temporary pleasures of the flesh. That is why love can endure all things with rejoicing until the victory is won!

Love “never faileth.” (vs. 8) Truly, if we are governed at all times by the great principle of love, trusting in the merit of Christ to cover our unwilling imperfections, the victory is sure. While running in the spiritual racecourse, and fighting the good fight of faith, let us not depend upon human wisdom and human strength. Rather, let us “run” and “fight” in harmony with the divine rules, that we may attain unto the “crown of life” at the end of the way.—Rev. 2:10

From the standpoint of the flesh, love’s way may often seem foolish and impractical. It will, indeed, lead at times to temporal loss and defeat. It did with Jesus. Let us remember, however, that we are striving for the unseen things, and that these are obtainable only at the expense of temporal, earthly blessings. Our progress in the Christian way is

determined by the extent to which we are able to lay down the things of the flesh in order that others may be blessed. Therefore, let us say with Paul, “I ... so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air.” ■