

Fleeing to Victory 1 Corinthians 10:1-22

A prize to win

Being a Christian is good, I hope you think that

Knowing forgiveness, having a secure identity and a life that has meaning, being able to call the living God our Father and knowing you are heard by Him when you pray to Him, being assured of His steadfast love, being in a community with a commitment to love, and more – like hope of resurrection

In our culture though, focused as it is on the present, even for believers that future hope is often left in the background, a kind of afterthought

But for Christians in other parts of the world, where their confession costs, where it can mean social exclusion, abuse, loss of work, even imprisonment and violence, where their experience is often one of present difficulty and hardship, a focus on present benefits doesn't make a lot of sense on its own

And it didn't make a lot of sense to the apostle Paul, for whom being a Christian meant hardship and suffering, being treated, in his words, 'like the scum of the earth, like everyone's garbage' 1 Cor. 4:13

In fact he writes in 1 Cor. 15:19 *"If we have put our hope in Christ for this life only, we should be pitied more than any one."*

For Paul the Christian life, as you heard last week, was a race to be run to gain the prize at the end, the imperishable crown

1 Corinthians 9:24 Don't you know that the runners in a stadium all race, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way to win the prize. 25 Now everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything. They do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable crown.

That crown, the prize at the end, was of such value that both present suffering and present benefits pale into insignificance when compared with what will be

It is hard for us now to describe and feel the full wonder and goodness of what will be just as it is hard for a baby in the womb to describe the richness of the life it is soon to enter

With its very limited experience of life it's hard for a baby in the womb to imagine a world with the light of the sun, with colour and movement and conversation, an indescribably richer world for which womb life has prepared it.

Never having experienced any other than a world marred by sin, a mind and body twisted with self love

Never having drunk undiluted goodness, seen unfading beauty

We find it hard to imagine the greatness of what will be, the prize for which believers run the race to obtain, although we have hints of it in Scripture

Paul can describe the defeat of death in our being given bodies animated by God's Spirit, bodies like Christ's glorious body, incorruptible and mighty [1 Cor. 15]

John says we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is 1 John 3:2

Revelation gives us a glimpse of a world of light, when there will be no death, or grief, crying and pain, when God will wipe every tear from our eye, a life without fear or violence [Rev. 21]

A time when we can rest, rest from our struggle with sin and its effects

That prize, says Paul, is worth 'exercising self control in all things', worth keeping on running with purpose, and if you have ever felt the grief and horror of death, found yourself wounded by sin, you know he is right

²⁶ So I do not run, says Paul, like one who runs aimlessly or box like one beating the air. ²⁷ Instead, I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

It's intense language, isn't it

The language of the Olympic athlete

And we can admire those athletes, their focus and self-discipline – but think, that's not for me

I'm just not made for those 4:30 am starts for training before work, that self-denial, that repetitive exercise. I'd rather be the spectator on the couch.

And that is the way we can think about what Paul says about the Christian life here and earlier in chapter 9

We can admire that focus on sharing the gospel – becoming all things to all people so that by all means he might save some

That denial of rights – forgoing what he is entitled to for the sake of others

The self-control that sustains that way of life, the passionate conviction and self-discipline

And say – that's Paul

He's Awesome

But its not for me.

I'm more comfortable on the couch.

But Paul's point is that every believer has to run that race, run focused on the prize; every believer has to exercise that self control

Good starts don't guarantee good endings 10:1-5

And to make that point he's going to get us and the Corinthians to think about the experience of God's Old Testament people in the Exodus.

1 Corinthians 10: Now I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, all passed through the sea, ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³ They all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless God was not pleased with most of them, since they were struck down in the wilderness.

He deliberately writes of the experience of the Exodus generation to make clear the relation of their experience to our experience as believers in Jesus

He calls them our 'ancestors', our forefathers.

And that is not because most of the Corinthian believers were Jews. Some were [Acts 18:8], but many were not [Acts 18:7, 9]

It is because there is a continuity between the Old Testament people of God and the new testament people of God, as people of the same God caught up in the one saving plan

Now that Exodus generation had a great, miraculous, beginning – experiencing God's rescue of them from slavery in Egypt by His saving presence in the cloud and in His victory over Pharaoh at the Red Sea. [Exodus 14]

They saw Pharaoh's army approaching [Ex. 14:10]

Felt the fear

And then they had known the protection of the cloud's presence between them and Pharaoh [14:19-20]

And seen the LORD part the red sea, walked through with the water on both sides, and the next day seen the bodies of the Egyptian army on the seashore [Exodus 14:30]

That's an impressive beginning

And in that experience, in that rescue, they 'were baptized into Moses', had become followers of Moses, people who related to God as their God through the revelation God gave through Moses

And they had known God sustaining them in their journey to the promised land under Moses' leadership

God had provided them with manna from heaven – spiritual food

Spiritual – not because it is immaterial, but because its origin is in the work of God's powerful Spirit. He was the source of that food, their sustainer when all normal material means had failed

And they had drunk spiritual drink – drunk the water from the rock provided by God's Spirit

And to heighten the link, the relationship between that generation's experience and believers experience, Paul says 'and that rock was Christ', was a type of Christ, who brings us the sustaining life of the Spirit from His death [John 7:37-39]

For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ

Theirs was a great beginning – just as the Corinthians had a great beginning, being enriched Paul said in his introduction 'in every way, in all speech and all knowledge', not lacking any spiritual gift 1:4-7

And theirs was a wonderful sustaining – just as the Corinthians knew God's provision for sustaining them on their journey through Christ, through continuing to share in the benefits of His death as symbolized and mediated in the bread and drink of the Lord's Supper which Paul will speak of shortly

Nevertheless God was not pleased with most of them, since they were struck down in the wilderness.

A great beginning, a wonderful ongoing provision – but most didn't make it to the promised goal, were disqualified by death from entering the promised land

The behaviours God's Word says disqualify 10:6-11

Why were they struck down in the wilderness? Why having started so well did they fail to come to the promised land?

And why is their experience relevant to the Corinthians and us?

1 Corinthians 10: 6 Now these things took place as examples for us, so that we will not desire evil things as they did.

*7 Don't become idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, **The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to party.** 8 Let us not commit sexual immorality as some of them did, and in a single day twenty-three thousand people died. 9 Let us not test Christ as some of them did and were destroyed by snakes. 10 And don't grumble as some of them did, and were killed by the destroyer. 11 These things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our instruction, on whom the ends of the ages have come.*

Let's start with the last question – why is Israel's exodus experience relevant to us? Paul states in vv. 6 and 11 that these things happened to them as examples for us.

The story of the Exodus generation provides a pattern that corresponds to what is or can happen in the life of a believer, gives us an example that tells us how God will respond to certain actions of His people.

And this is not by chance – v. 11. It was written down for our instruction, and the our is all believers – for every believer in Jesus is someone 'on whom the ends of the ages have come', someone who is living in the overlap

between this present evil age and the age to come which the Lord Jesus has ushered in by His resurrection and pouring out of the Spirit on His people.

God had us in mind when He caused Moses to write down the events of the Exodus. The Old Testament is His provision for our instruction and encouragement. Its teaching value is not an after the event discovery, but the product of His intention at the time.

The record of Israel's experience is relevant to us because the Lord intended it to be relevant to us, He intends us to learn from it.

First big takeaway

If you are not reading your Old Testament you are neglecting God's provision for our perseverance.

God caused it to be written so that we could know Him, know how to trust Him, and know the life that would be pleasing to Him

Are you making use of it?

Good test – do you know these events Paul speaks of?

If not – a good start could be reading the events he speaks of here, and reflecting on them

Then perhaps reading the books – Exodus and Numbers, they are part of

Or reading Genesis to Deuteronomy to put those events in the big story of Creation and God's call of and promises to Abraham.

Better than TV or video games – those things give you an imaginative world, a world seen through the eyes and recreated in the world view of their makers

The Scriptures give you reality – the world as made and interpreted to us by the living God who is truth.

If you are not reading your Old Testament you are neglecting God's provision for you.

So let's learn the lesson God has given us the Scriptures to teach us

Why was most of that exodus generation struck down in the wilderness? Why having started so well did they fail to come to the promised land? What does their experience tell us believers in Jesus must avoid

⁶ *Now these things took place as examples for us, so that we will not desire evil things as they did.*

Paul starts by telling us they desired evil – that is the problem started in their hearts, with what they longed for, what they craved, what they could not discipline themselves to deny.

and then He gives us four examples of their evil desire at work – two of actions, and two of attitudes – so we would never act or think like them.

⁷ *Don't become idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, **The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to party.***

He is referring to Mount Sinai where the Israelites made and worshipped a golden calf. He quotes Exodus 32:6 to remind us that their idolatry was expressed in worship that involved sacrifice, eating and drinking, and then immoral revelry.

Exodus 32:³ So all the people took off the gold rings that were on their ears and brought them to Aaron. ⁴ He took the gold from them, fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made it into an image of a calf.

Then they said, "Israel, these are your gods, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!"

⁵ When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of it and made an announcement: "There will be a festival to the LORD tomorrow." ⁶ Early the next morning they arose, offered burnt offerings, and presented fellowship offerings. The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to party.

The Israelites' worship of the golden calf was a great affront to God. They had already eaten and drunk His spiritual food and drink – but here they were giving praise for their rescue to something they had made, Likening the living God to the dead product of their imagination and hands, and preferring its food to God's provision.

That idolatry almost lead to Israel's destruction as a people, were it not for Moses' intervention

It's a pointed example for the Corinthians, because the issue this section started with in Chapter 8, and with which you heard our passage finish, concerns food sacrificed to idols, and some feeling free to eat in idols temples 8:10

1 Corinthians 8: ¹⁰ For if someone sees you, the one who has knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, won't his weak conscience be encouraged to eat food offered to idols?

but you might be thinking to yourself – idolatry, that is not my issue. While I might have some Hindu or Buddhist friends or family – I'm never going to worship a statue. I don't think idols are anything real.

Some of the Corinthians thought that – but they still weren't safe in that knowledge as we will see.

And it is thinking a little narrowly about idolatry.

As Rosner says 'A god is what one loves, trusts and serves', what one looks to for ultimate identity and security.

You can make a relationship an idol

You can make, as our Lord said, money an idol

You can make an idol of your autonomy or your feelings, loving yourself and your own freedom above God, trusting your judgments of right and wrong above His word

Don't become idolaters, as some of them were

Next Paul draws their attention to the behaviour of Israel and God's response at Baal-Peor, on the borders of the promised land, recounted in Numbers 25:1-3

⁸ *Let us not commit sexual immorality as some of them did, and in a single day twenty-three thousand people died.*

Numbers 25: While Israel was staying in the Acacia Grove, the people began to prostitute themselves with the women of Moab. ² The women invited them to the sacrifices for their gods, and the people ate and bowed in worship to their gods. ³ So Israel aligned itself with Baal of Peor, and the LORD's anger burned against Israel.

Israelite men engaged there in sexual immorality with Moabite women – wrong in itself, - which then led into participating v.2 in the sacrifices and feasts involved in worshipping their gods.

And thousands died, [24,000 in a plague [Numbers 25:9], twenty three thousand of them in one day – a plague stopped only by the action of Phinehas]

Believers in the Lord Jesus must not commit sexual immorality and expect to come to their prize, remembering that sexual immorality is any sexual activity that takes place outside the context of marriage, a public commitment with witnesses, between a man and a woman.

Paul has already made that clear in chapters 5 and 6, but Israel's experience reminds them of the dangers, and also that uncontrolled sexual desire can easily lead to idolatry

And that is what we often see – the determination to satisfy sexual desire – hetero or homo sexual desire – leads many to worship a god of their own creating

That desire is so strong that they would change God rather than exercise self-control, change to a god who endorses their behaviour, or at least turn a blind eye to it. Even if they claim this god is still the Christian god their god is not the living God who created us male and female and has spoken and expressed His will for sexual expression in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the living God who does not change, and who expects His people to love Him by doing His will, not by doing what pleases them.

Paul then moves to the incident you heard read from Numbers 21 to speak of the attitudes desiring evil can foster in our relationship with the living God

⁹ *Let us not test Christ as some of them did and were destroyed by snakes.*

In Numbers 25 you heard the Israelites 'speak against God and Moses', saying

Numbers 21:⁴ Then they set out from Mount Hor by way of the Red Sea to bypass the land of Edom, but the people became impatient because of the journey. ⁵ The people spoke against God and Moses: "Why have you led us up from Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread or water, and we detest this wretched food!" ⁶ Then the LORD sent poisonous snakes among the people, and they bit them so that many Israelites died.

Paul calls this testing Christ. It is testing because it is finding fault with God's provision and direction and demanding that He should be satisfying their desires and appetites. They are getting sustenance – manna, 'this wretched food' – but it is not what they desire

Instead they demanded God give them what they wanted, because in their view His provision was detestable and His way of trusting and following His chosen leader the way of death.

This testing God is the presumption that started with Adam and Eve, who decided they knew better than God what was best for them, what would give them the life they desired. From then on many have thought God's role, if He is to have a role in our lives, is to listen to us and take direction from us, to let us be God and be content to be the servant of our desires

And Paul calls it testing Christ because the Israelites say in Numbers 21:7 they have tested the Lord, and Paul in 1 Cor. 8:6 has already, as he does elsewhere e.g. Phil. 2:10-11, Romans 10:13, identified the Lord with Jesus Christ.

1 Cor. 8:⁶ yet for us there is one God, the Father. All things are from him, and we exist for him. And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ. All things are through him, and we exist through him.

This way of speaking strengthens the link between their experience and the experience of new covenant believers for we are testing the Lord when we demand the Lord Jesus should do things our way, make the provision for us we demand, give us what we desire, if we are to reckon His way the way of life

When we Demand he fulfill our desire for wealth

Or our desire for a life partner

Or children, or health

And not bring us on the path for us He has chosen, a path that, like His own, involves suffering and self-denial, a path of trusting our Father God even when it means we feel like we are dying, we are testing the Lord

Like bread and water – all those things are good things

But to say the Lord is only good and wise if He fulfills our desires, that His is the way of life only when HE gives us what we want when we want it – is to test the LORD, demand He prove Himself to us on our terms. Such testing is to despise what God has already done for us in giving His Son for us, and it is a repudiation of the repentance and faith the gospel calls for. We put ourselves back in the place of God – and will disqualify us from the prize

And closely related to testing the Lord is the fourth of the sins that caused those who started so well to perish in the wilderness

¹⁰ *And don't grumble as some of them did, and were killed by the destroyer.*

If testing the LORD is demanding of God, complaining to God, then grumbling is complaining about God and His provision to each other, an undercurrent of articulated discontent that eventually surfaces in open criticism

It is something that is spoken of in Numbers 11, 14 and 16, and in each case it ended in the death of many.

In Numbers 14 the people openly criticize God's plan and the leadership He has provided

[Numbers 14: Then the whole community broke into loud cries, and the people wept that night. ² All the Israelites complained about Moses and Aaron, and the whole community told them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt, or if only we had died in this wilderness! [Num. 14:27, 29]

Numbers 16: ⁴¹ The next day the entire Israelite community complained about Moses and Aaron, saying, "You have killed the LORD's people!"

And in Numbers 16 they criticize the leaders appointed by God, outraged by the LORD's judgment on Korah and his followers.

Grumbling is that critical attitude that says I have right to judge God and condemn His servants who speak His Word, the attitude that rejects God's actions and words as good

At its heart is pride, the pride that is sure we are more righteous and knowledgeable than God and desires to be in control. This grumbling condemns God and demands he change His ways to our ways

How could God let that happen, we say

How could God judge any

We see a lot of grumbling in the world, the open criticism of God

But you can see it in people in church, perhaps you have even been tempted by it

I can't believe God would deny someone the expression of their love

How could God ask that of me when ...

Idolatry, sexual immorality, putting the Lord to the test, grumbling

All these stopped those who started so well, with such powerful salvation experiences, from entering the promised land

And these things will stop us from attaining the prize, stop us from being victorious in our race, from entering the new heaven and earth

And so Paul concludes these Scriptural examples of failure by calling us to consider our position, consider the grounds of our confidence

Paul's conclusion – warning and hope 10:12-13

1 Corinthians 10: ¹² So, whoever thinks he stands must be careful not to fall.

There were some at Corinth who were very confident of their spiritual status, of their knowledge, of their being saved, able to stand, on the last day

A confidence that allowed them to criticise Paul for his ministry – even his working without payment from them [1 Cor. 4:3, 9:3]

A confidence that allowed them to act on their rights without regard for the consciences of those weaker in the faith [1 Cor. 8]

A confidence that made them feel they were safe in the exercise of their freedom, that all things were permissible for them, even frequenting prostitutes [1 Cor. 6:12, 10:23] or eating in idol temples

A confidence that they were safe without the focus or self-control of Paul

So Paul says to them – Consider the Scriptures. Is your confidence justified?

But this is also a general warning, a call to each of us to see if those behaviours are in our life

We can be very self-deceived about our spiritual security.

You can be teaching God's word, and yet doing things God forbids – even doing those things you are telling others not to – and justifying it because of the unique value of your work, or thinking God will make an exception of you because of your unique gifts – and you don't have to be someone famous like Ravi Zacharias to be trapped in that self deception

Or excuse our sexual immorality because of how right it feels and so telling ourselves it must be good and sanctioned by God

Or Claim because we are in the right, standing for the truth, we have a right to ignore the needs of others, to act lovelessly,

We can be in church every week, never doubting our spiritual standing, but becoming bitter because God has not answered our prayers in the way we wanted

Or, confident of the righteousness of our conscience, Openly criticising what God has said – say about judgment or sexual morality – while claiming to be a good, a devout, Christian

We can be doing these things that will disqualify yet be sure that we will be ok in the judgement because of our experience of becoming a Christian, or because of our bible knowledge or our giftedness or long habit of involvement

Be careful says Paul

And don't excuse your sin

By claiming the circumstances you are under are so unique

Or because of the intensity of your temptation

Or because the cost of obedience is too great, too much to expect of anyone

Or because you claim you had no other choice, no way you could see of not sinning. You hear that sometimes. If I hadn't used porn I would have gone to prostitutes;

No excuses

¹³ No temptation has come upon you except what is common to humanity. But God is faithful; he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to bear it.

Let's face it

The temptation to satisfy our desires is common to us all. Israel has already experienced it

Whether it is desire for friends, for sexual pleasure, for control, for having the food we crave, the lifestyle we enjoy

All experience that

The temptation to think we know better than God what is good for us, to trust ourselves and our own judgment over God's Word, that's common to us all

The temptation to demand God prove Himself to us, to relate on our terms not His, that's common to us all

Whatever temptation you are feeling, however strongly you are feeling it, you are not unique. It has happened to others

Hear that – because one of the devil's lies is that what is happening to you is exceptional and God's word wasn't made for your circumstance,

But, in contrast to our unfaithfulness, God is faithful

Faithful to His promise to save

Faithful to His purpose to have a people for His own in Christ

And the faithful God gives us a promise

But God is faithful; he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to bear it.

This is a promise many misunderstand

I won't be tempted beyond what I am able.

God will make me a spiritual superman, able to leap strong temptations in a single bound, so I don't have to be wise in what I expose myself to, don't have to work at avoiding temptation

But this promise is not given to embolden vain self-confidence in our own godliness.

What form does God's not permitting us to be tempted beyond what we are able take?

His limiting the power of temptation comes in the form of providing a way of escape, providing a way out.

Now escaping is not glamorous, and its not flattering. To escape you need to humble yourself, acknowledge, confess your weakness – that you are not strong enough to take on and withstand the raging fire of desire – that you find it only too easy to get drunk when everyone else is drinking, to engage in off conversation when you're with your mates, that sexual desire is overpowering when you are left alone together, that the desire to impress at work will make you reluctant to confess Jesus. That despite the plans you have made you still have to get in the car and drive away in the face of the approaching fire if you are to live.

And you may well have to leave a lot behind, like those who leave their properties as the fire comes. There can be a cost to escaping – others may think you are weird, some jobs may be closed off to you, some technology denied to you, some relationships be lost to you.

But God is faithful. He will provide the way of escape. Whether you look for it, however, whether you use it – that will reveal how much you trust His word as the word that gives you life, how much you want to stay faithful to Him, whether you believe the prize at the end of the race is worth everything.

And that is the difference between escaping the desires that would disqualify, and escaping the fire that consumes. We are not, like the Ukrainian refugees, escaping with our lives at the loss of our homes. We escape with our lives from those things that would stop us going home, give up what we would always lose to gain what we can never lose.

Take the way of escape.

Not a theoretical conversation – the dangerous behaviour of the strong 10:14-22

But up till now many of the Corinthians may have been a little puzzled, even if feeling a little uncomfortable, with what Paul has written.

So Paul now makes his application explicit. He lets them know this has not been a theoretical discussion about the history of Israel and what lessons we can learn from it, but that he has been writing to save their lives.

1 Corinthians 10: ¹⁴ So then, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵ I am speaking as to sensible people. Judge for yourselves what I am saying. ¹⁶ The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, since all of us share the one bread. ¹⁸ Consider the people of Israel. Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? ¹⁹ What am I saying then? That food sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰ No, but I do say that what they sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons! ²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot share in the Lord's table and the table of demons. ²² Or are we provoking the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

He speaks out of love to his dear friends, and he speaks directly

Flee from idolatry.

Whether they know it or not the actions of the strong in claiming their knowledge that an idol is nothing gave them freedom to eat in idol temples, to share in the feasting that followed the sacrifice of the animal to the god as part of the worship of the god, has put them in a position of great and imminent danger.

Rather than assuring themselves they were safe, they had to flee, urgently – if they were not to share in the fate of idolatrous Israel.

Leave the explanation of this either to next week or when we look at the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor. 11

But his basic point is that in sharing in the meals that followed the sacrifices made in the temples of idols, they were sharing in the worship of demons, and this was wholly incompatible with worshipping the true God by sharing in Christ

I know there is a lot more to unpack there, but I wanted this part of 1 Corinthians 10 included

So you could feel Paul's urgency

And recognise that he has been writing to rescue people he loves from a real and present danger – that they did not recognise

Not a theoretical conversation for us

They did not recognise the danger because they did not want to.

They wanted to be able to eat those sacrifices in idol temples

They desired the social connection and the security of being included

They desired the commercial networks and the wealth it created

And, where meat was a rare inclusion in the diet, they wanted their appetite for meat satisfied

And they talked themselves out of the obvious, that this was idolatry, by a claim to knowledge, by taking one truth, that an idol is nothing, and making it the whole truth, the only truth to be considered

We can be like them

We can deceive ourselves into thinking idolatry is right because we want to

TO persuade ourselves that we can participate in multifaith services where the true God is made equal to lies or in ancestor rituals on the basis that their gods are no gods at all, and it is right to foster community unity - because we desire the social inclusion and approval

WE can deceive ourselves into thinking sexual immorality, our own or others, is right because we want to

To say God made me with these desires, and everything He makes is good and so He would want me to fulfill them, putting aside what HE has so clearly said about the context for their expression, because we want to satisfy our desire

We can deceive ourselves that putting the Lord to the test is right because we want to

We can want something so badly that we demand it of God, make His goodness depend on Him giving us what we want, and use the language of faith to veil our lack of faith

We can deceive ourselves into thinking grumbling is right because we want to

Our bitterness and anger and disappointment with God and the life He has given us in His sovereign wisdom can overflow in our speech, and then we talk of the virtue of being honest about how we feel about God, and criticise those who would point us away from ourselves to His goodness known in His Son, even claim we have a right to be angry and disappointed

God hasn't brought us here tonight for a theoretical conversation, but to rescue you from real and present dangers that threaten to disqualify you, to cause you to be excluded from God's people

To say to you "Beware lest thinking that you stand you fall"

He is calling you to examine your life and find the way of escape from ways of acting and thinking that will disqualify you from the prize

That prize is worth everything

And the life that attains it is the life Paul calls for

We may not be Olympians

But in the spiritual race none of us are spectators – and there is only one way of competing

Focused on the prize at the end of the race, not thinking we get it all now

A life of self-control in all things, that trains itself every day to say no to those desires that disqualify us

Where we learn from the Scriptures and receive the encouragement of the Scriptures to persevere

we have the Humility to use the way of escape our faithful God provides

With thankfulness, not grieved by the loss but thankful for the eternal gain