Text: I Corinthians 9:24-27
Title: "High Definition Living … Self-Control"

INTRODUCTION

We've been talking about High Definition Living … a life that reflects the glory of God. Let's turn once again to the verse that has been our anchor through the study.

1 Corinthians 10:31 (NIV) - So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

First Corinthians 8-10 talks about the living life in such a way that the glory of God is manifested in our lives. God is glorified when we live for His purposes. And His purposes involve two things:

- The edification of believers – building up other believers
- The evangelization of non-believers – helping as many non-believers come to Christ as possible

Now open your Bibles to I Corinthians 9:24-27.

> We've talked about how by limiting my liberties and by self-denial, I lay aside my own agenda, my own comfort and convenience, in order to better fulfill the purposes of God in building up other believers, and winning the lost to Jesus Christ. And this morning we're going to talk about how we bring glory to God through self-control.

Read I Corinthians 9:24-27.

ILLUSTRATION – A couple of years a movie came out entitled "Click." The story is about a guy named Michael Newman (played by Adam Sandler) who is given a true "universal" remote control (you've heard about those … the kind that is supposed to control every piece of electronics you have … TV, satellite, microwave, toaster…) Well this remote is truly a "universal" remote. It has the power to influence real life situations. He can mute peoples' voices, fast-forward through annoying conversations, and even rewind through past experiences.

> There's one scene where Michael is talking to Morty who originally gave him the remote. Michael is unsatisfied at work, too busy at home, and unable to regain control over his overstuffed world. He wants Morty's advice on a plan he has. Michael's plan is to use the "remote control" to skip the next two months of his life in order to avoid waiting for a promotion.
>
> Morty asks, "Have you considered the consequences of what you're about to do?"
>
> "Yeah," Michael answers. "Why, you think I shouldn't do it?"
>
> "It's your life. What you do with the remote is your life…."

Life is like that. As much as we would like to, you can't just hit the skip button and jump over all the hard stuff in life … all the difficult parts of the Christian life. God is doing something through the things we have to face. He's working out certain things in our life, and for that to happen we have exercise self-control

Paul pulls into the picture something that was a common thing in his day, as it is in ours … the world of athletics.

ILLUSTRATION – I guess this may be the sports addict's prime time of the year. After all, you have NHL playoffs, NBA playoffs, and MLB all going on at the same time. Throw in some great PGA events and a little NASCAR on the side … especially with a hi-def TV. What more could a sports nut want?

> Well, when Paul wrote these words to the Corinthian Christians he assumed that they all knew about "the games." The Olympic Games took place in Greece every four years. On top of that on the off years in Corinth they held what was called the Isthmian games, held ever two years. The name is derived from the isthmus of Corinth, where the games were held.

Well Paul uses those games as a powerful backdrop for the challenge about self-control. Just look at the life of a dedicated athlete and you'll see from a physical perspective what God is looking for in us from a spiritual perspective.

> I think this is what the Holy Spirit is after here: When you see the athletes run, think about another kind of running. When you see them boxing, think about another kind of boxing. When you see them training and denying themselves, think about another kind of training and self-denial. When you see them winning and receiving the prize, think about another kind of prize."

There are two things we see in these verses.

1. THE <u>RUNNING</u> OF THE RACE

How we run matters!

Hebrews 12:1 (NIV) - Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

So let's look briefly at how then we should run.

- **RUN WITH <u>DETERMINATION</u>**

  ILLUSTRATION - Heisman trophy winner Herschel Walker once said, "My God-given talent is my ability to stick with something longer than anyone else."

1 Corinthians 9:24 (NIV) - Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.

Note: Let me just set something straight here before you go off in the wrong direction with this. The analogy breaks down at a point. In most all athletic competitions, you are competing against someone else. That's not true with the Christian life. We are running with others, but not competing against them.

In fact, as we have seen all along, I really win when God's best is worked in the lives of others. It's not just about me winning and getting the prize and the applause.

So what is the goal? The goal is to run the way a winner runs. And how does the winner run? He runs hard. He gives the race everything he has. And this is the way we are to run in our service for Christ: with determination, not lazy or idle or sluggish or unconcerned.

Now Paul gets more specific about the way a winner keeps himself in condition for running.

- **RUN WITH <u>DISCIPLINE</u>.**

1 Corinthians 9:25a (NIV) - Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training.

By the way, this passage smells of sweat. You hear the sound of hard breathing. You're watching hard work here. When Paul uses the word "compete" he uses the word *agonizomai* from which we get our word "agony' or "agonize."

You see, athletes participating in the games were required to sign a commitment to train for several months prior to the games. And the last month they would come to Corinth for the last training under the watchful eye of a coach.

Training is all about the discipline to control impulses in order to run like a winner. The impulses we have to control are the impulses to do things that will weaken us. For the athlete it has to with physical training … going to bed early, eating the right food, attending workout sessions.

> The Christian takes note of all the impulses and all the habits and practices of his life that weaken his zeal for God and his joy of faith, and he takes control of them and puts them out of his life.

And one thing is for sure: the human body will say "No! to this kind of discipline and suffering. The body will say, "I will not pay that price!" Imagine Paul ready to enter a hostile town with the gospel. He has been beaten four times already with 39 lashes during his ministry. He knows it could happen again. For a moment he wavers in his race when the body says, "No, I won't go. It's painful to go. No!" But self-control takes over, and he moves forward.

- **RUN WITH <u>DIRECTION</u>**

1 Corinthians 9:26 (NIV) - Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air.

ILLUSTRATION – Do you remember the scene in Alice in Wonderland where Alice asks Cheshire Cat, "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" The cat replies, "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to." Alice says, "I don't much care where..." and the cat replies, "Then it doesn't matter which way you go." Alice says that she just wants to get somewhere, and Cheshire Cat tells her, "Oh, you're sure to do that if you only walk long enough."

We are certain to end up somewhere. The important question you must ask yourself is "Where am I going?"

We have to stop in the middle of every day and ask, "I'm going somewhere with this attitude, these words, these thoughts, these actions, this relationship. If I keep going this direction, where will it lead? Will it lead to excellence for Christ, edification for other believers, evangelizing a lost world?

That's the word about running the race. There's also a word about…

2. THE <u>WINNING</u> OF THE RACE

Life is not a game without lasting consequences. The way we live our lives has eternal consequences.

ILLUSTRATION – Have you ever been to a children's T-Ball game? What a fun thing to watch. There are a few rules, but not many. They don't keep score. The point is for the kids to have a good time, to learn the sport and to get some exercise. And you see a kid that hits the ball of the tee, and then takes off running toward third base, and then she realizes she's going the wrong way and so she takes off running across the ball diamond to second base, then to first. And everyone applauds here and says "Good job!" And that's fine for the T-Ball league.

But the stakes are much higher for the Christian life.

1 Corinthians 9:24 – "One gets the prize … Run in such a way as to get the prize."

1 Corinthians 9:25b – "They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever."

"crown" = stephanos which would refer to the pine wreath that was placed on the head of the winner. Historians tell us that the winners of the Isthmian games received a wreath of celery later, the wreath consisted of pine branches. There would be great honor attached to that prize.

Of course, the winner would take that pine wreath home and you know what would happen to it.

ILLUSTRATION – When I was a college student, my roommate and I decided one Christmas that we would have a real Christmas tree in little upstairs garage apartment. And

we did. It was great. It was my first Christmas tree away from home. And it was glorious. New Years rolled around and the tree was still up. Valentines Day rolled around, and the tree was still sitting there. But it looked bad. We finally decided it was about time to take down that pine tree. By the time we drug it across the floor and down the stairs, that tree didn't have a single needle left on it. And for months we would walk across the carpet and step on pine needles. That tree was perishable, corruptible.

And that's what would happen to that winner's wreath. Sooner or later it would fall apart. And even if people remembered the winner, they wouldn't remember for long.

So what is all this running, fighting, and training about? What is that great prize that we have before us as we live out our life as God's people? What is at stake?

- **The first thing that is on the line here is the fulfillment of God's <u>purpose</u> for our lives.**

  This is all about running toward a goal that God has set for us to fulfill His purposes for our lives.

  Philippians 3:12 (NIV) - Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

  Philippians 3:14 (NIV) - I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

  This is the unique thing about the way a Christian runs the race of life. We are not running because we see Jesus the judge at the end watching to see how run in our own strength. No, we run as those who have already been take hold of by Jesus for the prize. We run to win the prize in the passion of fulfilling God's ultimate purpose for our life.

- **The second thing that is at stake, that is on the line, is our eternal <u>reward</u>.**

  2 Timothy 4:7-8 (NIV) - I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. [8] Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

  2 Corinthians 5:10 (NIV) - For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

- **The third thing on the line here is the <u>salvation</u> of others.**

  Remember the context of I Corinthians 9. Paul is talking about the approach he takes to life so that he can accomplish the mission God gave him.

  1 Corinthians 9:19 (NIV) - Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.

1 Corinthians 9:22 (NIV) - To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

1 Corinthians 9:23 (NIV) - I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

- **The fourth thing on the line is ultimately the <u>glory</u> of God.**

  1 Corinthians 10:31 (NIV) - So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

CONCLUSION

God has not saved you to sit in the stands. God has not saved you to lie down on the track. God has not saved you sit on the edge of the pool with your feet in the water. God has saved you to spend yourself for the glory of his Son

1 Corinthians 9:27 (NIV) - 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.