

Spiritual boxer!

(Highlighted areas added)

1 Corinthians 9:26-27 (TLB)

So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I fight to win. I'm not just shadow-boxing or playing around. 27 Like an athlete I punish my body, treating it roughly, training it to do what it should, not what it wants to. Otherwise I fear that after enlisting others for the race, I myself might be declared unfit and ordered to stand aside.

1 Corinthians 9:26-27 (AMP)

Therefore I do not run uncertainly (without definite aim). I do not box like one beating the air and striking without an adversary. 27 But [like a boxer] I buffet my body [handle it roughly, discipline it by hardships] and subdue it, for fear that after proclaiming to others the Gospel and things pertaining to it, I myself should become unfit [not stand the test, be unapproved and rejected as a counterfeit].

1 Corinthians 9:26-27 (KJV)

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.

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Verse 26. I therefore so run. In the Christian race; in my effort to obtain the prize, the crown of immortality. I exert myself to the utmost, that I may not fail of securing the crown.

Not as uncertainly; *ουκαδηλως*. This word occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It usually means, in the classic writers, *obscurely*. Here it means that he did not run as not knowing to what object he aimed. **"I do not run at hap-hazard; I do not exert myself for naught; I know at what I aim, and I keep my eye fixed on the object; I have the goal and the crown in view."**

Probably also the apostle intended to convey this idea, **"I so live and act that I am sure of obtaining the crown."**

I make it a great and grand point of my life so to live that there may be no room for doubt or hesitancy about this matter. I believe it *may* be obtained; and that by a proper course there may be a constant certainty of securing it; and I so LIVE."

Oh, how happy and blessed would it be if all Christians thus lived! **How much doubt, and hesitancy, and despondency would it remove from many a Christian's mind!** And yet it is morally certain that if every Christian were to be only as anxious and careful as were the ancient Grecian wrestlers and racers in the games, they would have the undoubted assurance of gaining the prize. Doddridge and Macknight, however, render this, "as not out of view;" or as not distinguished; meaning that the apostle was not unseen, but that he regarded himself as constantly in the view of the judge, the Lord Jesus Christ. I prefer the other interpretation, however, as best according with the connexion and with the proper meaning of the word.

So fight I. οὐτωπυκτεω. **This word is applied to the boxers,** or the pugilists, in the Grecian games. The exercise of boxing, or fighting with the fist, was a part of the entertainment with which the enlightened nations of Greece delighted to amuse themselves.

Not as one that beateth the air. The phrase here is taken from the habits of the pugilists or **boxers,** who were accustomed, **before entering the lists, to exercise their limbs with the gauntlet, in order to acquire greater skill and dexterity.**

There was also, before the real contest commenced, a play with their fists and weapons, by way of show or bravado, which was called σκιαμαχια, a mock-battle, or a **fighting the air.** **The phrase also is applicable to a missing the aim, when a blow was struck in a real struggle, and when the adversary would elude the blow, so that it would be spent in the empty air.**

This last is the idea which **Paul** means to present. **He did not miss his aim; he did not exert himself and spend his strength for naught.**

Every blow that he struck told; and he did not waste his energies on that which would produce no result.

He did not strive with rash, ill-advised, or uncertain blows; but all his efforts were directed, with good account, to the grand purpose of subjugating his enemy-sin, and the corrupt desires of the flesh-and bringing everything into captivity to God.

Much may be learned from this. **Many an effort of Christians is merely beating the air.**

The energy is expended for naught. There is a want of wisdom, or skill, or perseverance; **there is a failure of plan; or there is a mistake in regard to what is to be done, and what should be done.**

There is often among Christians very little aim or object; there is no plan; and the efforts are wasted, scattered, inefficient efforts; so that, at the close of life, many a man may say that he has spent his ministry or his Christian course mainly, or entirely, in beating the air.

Besides, many a one sets up a **man of straw,** and fights that. **He fancies error and heresy in others, and opposes that.**

He becomes **a heresy-hunter;** or he opposes some irregularity in religion that, if left alone, would die of itself; or he fixes all his attention on some minor evil, and devotes his life to the destruction of that alone.

When death comes, he may have never struck a blow at one of the *real* and dangerous enemies of the gospel; and the simple record on the tombstone of many a minister and many a private Christian might be, "Here lies one who spent his life in beating the air."

(*) "beateth" "strike"

Verse 27. But I keep under my body. υποπιάζω. This word occurs in the New Testament only here and in [Luke 18:5](#), "Lest by her continual coming she weary me." The word is derived probably from υποποιν, the part of the face under the eye, (*Passow*;) and means, properly, to strike under the eye, either with the fist or the cestus, so as to render the part livid, or, as we say, black and blue; or, as is vulgarly termed, to give any one a black eye. The word is derived, of course, from the athletic exercises of the Greeks. It then comes to mean, *to treat any one with harshness, severity, or cruelty*; and thence also so to treat any evil inclinations or dispositions; or to subject one's self to mortification or self-denial, or to a severe and rigid discipline, **that all the corrupt passions might be removed. The word here means, that Paul made use of all possible means to subdue his corrupt and carnal inclinations; to show that he was not under the dominion of evil passions, but was wholly under the dominion of the gospel.**

And bring it into subjection, δουλαγωγω. This word properly means, to reduce to servitude or slavery; and probably was usually **applied to the act of subduing an enemy**, and leading him captive from the field of battle; as the captives in war were regarded as slaves.

It then means, effectually and totally to subdue, to conquer, to reduce to bondage and subjection. **Paul means by it, the purpose to obtain a complete victory over his corrupt passions and propensities, and a design to gain the mastery over all his natural and evil inclinations.**

Lest that by any means. [1 Corinthians 9:22](#). Paul designed to make every possible effort to be saved. He did not mean to be lost, but he meant to be saved. He felt that there was danger of being deceived and lost; and he meant by some means to have evidence of piety that would abide the trial of the day of judgment.

When I have preached to others. Doddridge renders this, "lest after having served as a herald to others, I should myself be disapproved;" and supposes that there was allusion in this to the Grecian *herald*, whose business it was to proclaim the conditions of the games, to display the prizes, etc. In this interpretation, also, Macknight, Rosenmuller, Koppe, and most of the modern interpreters agree. They suppose, therefore, that the allusion to the games is carried through all this description.

But there is this difficulty in this interpretation, that it represents the apostle as *both* a herald and a contender in the games, and thus leads to an inextricable confusion of metaphor. Probably, therefore, this is to be taken in the usual sense of the word *preaching* in the New Testament; and the apostle here is to be understood as *dropping* the metaphor, and speaking in the usual manner.

He had preached to others, to many others. He had proclaimed the gospel far and near. He had preached to many thousands, and had been the means of the conversion of thousands. The contest, the agony, the struggle in which he had been engaged, was that of preaching the gospel in the most effectual manner. **And yet he felt that there was a possibility that even after all this he might be lost.**

I myself should be a castaway. This word (αδοκιμος) is taken from *bad metals*, and properly denotes those which will not bear the test that is applied to them; that are found to be base and worthless, and are therefore rejected and cast away.

The apostle had subjected himself to trials. He had given himself to self-denial and toil; to persecution and want; to perils, and cold, and nakedness, and hunger.

He had done this, among other things, to give his religion a fair trial, to see whether it would bear all these tests-as metal is cast into the fire to see whether it is genuine, or is base and worthless.

In doing this, he had endeavoured to subdue his corrupt propensities, and bring everything into captivity to the Redeemer, that it might be found that he was sincere, and humble, and devoted Christian.

Many have supposed that the word "cast-away" here refers to those who had entered the lists, and had contended, and who had then been examined as to the manner in which they had conducted the contest, and had been found to have departed from the rules of the games, and who were then rejected.

But this interpretation is too artificial and unnatural. **The simple idea of Paul is,** that he was afraid that he should be disapproved, rejected, cast off; that it would appear, after all, that he had no religion, and would then be cast away as unfit to enter into heaven.

From the many remarks which might be made from this interesting chapter, we may select the following:

(1.) We see the great anxiety which Paul had to save souls. This was his grand purpose; and for this he was willing to deny himself and to bear any trial.

(2.) We should be kind to others; we should not needlessly offend them; we should conform to them, as far as it can be done consistently with Christian integrity.

(3.) We should make an effort to be saved. Oh, if men made such exertions to obtain a corruptible crown, how much greater should we make to obtain one that fadeth not away!

(4.) Ministers, like others, are in danger of losing their souls. If *Paul* felt this danger, who is there among the ministers of the cross who should not feel it? If Paul was not safe, who is?

(5.) The fact that a man has preached to many is no certain evidence that he will be saved, [1 Corinthians 9:27](#). Paul had preached to thousands, and yet he felt that after all this there was a possibility that he might be lost.

(6.) The fact that a man has been very successful in the ministry is no certain evidence that he will be saved. God converts men; and he may sometimes do it by the instrumentality of those who themselves are deceived, or are deceivers. They may preach much truth; and God may bless that truth, and make it the means of saving the soul. There is no conclusive evidence that a man is a Christian simply because he is a successful and laborious preacher, any more than there is that a man is a Christian because he is a good farmer, and because God sends down the rain and the sunshine on his fields. Paul felt that even his success was no certain evidence that he would be saved. And if Paul felt thus, who should *not* feel that after the most distinguished success, he may himself be at last a cast-away?

(7.) It will be a solemn and awful thing for a minister of the gospel, and a *successful* minister, to go down to hell. What more fearful doom can be conceived, than after having led others in the way to life; after having described to them the glories of heaven; after having conducted them to the "sweet fields beyond the swelling flood" of death, he should find himself shut out, rejected, and cast down to hell! What more terrible can be imagined in the world of perdition than the doom of one who was once a minister of God, and once esteemed as a light in the church and a guide of souls, now sentenced to inextinguishable fires, while multitudes saved by him shall have gone to heaven ! How fearful is the condition, and how solemn the vocation, of a minister of the gospel!

(8.) Ministers should be solicitous about their personal piety. Paul, one might suppose, might have rested contented with the remarkable manner of his conversion. He might have supposed that that put the matter beyond all possible doubt. But he did no such thing. He felt that it was necessary to have evidence day by day that he was then a Christian. Of all men, Paul was perhaps *least* disposed to live on past experience, and to trust to such experience. Of all men, he had perhaps most reason to trust to such experience; and yet how seldom does he refer to it, how little does he regard it! **The great question with him was, "Am I now a Christian? am I living as a Christian should now? am I evincing to others, am I giving to myself daily, constant, growing evidence that I am actuated by the pure principles of the gospel, and that that gospel is the object of my highest preference, and my holiest and constant desire?"**

Oh, how holy would be the ministry, if all should endeavour every day to live and act for Christ and for souls with as much steadiness and fidelity as did the apostle Paul!

(* "I keep" [Romans 8:12](#)

(* "castaway" "rejected"

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