**Lest I Should Be Disqualified**

**1 Corinthians 9:24-10:5**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Are we saved by grace or our works? Of course, you know the answer. Indeed, it is the greatest truth. It has to do with Jesus, God’s Christ. Salvation from sin, purchased by the work of Christ was accomplished upon the cross, sealed in the empty tomb. That forgiveness Christ delivers today in the font, from the lips of pastors and others, and when believers eat and drink the Body and Blood of Christ.

But our Epistle appears to say some at odds with this truth. Let me read it to you again.

*Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self‑control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.*

*I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.*

Did you hear the statements? …only one receives the prize, so run that you may attain it.

Athletes exercise self-control to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

Our fathers were under the cloud (the presence of God), passed through the sea (God calls it their baptism), and ate and drank the same spiritual food and drink (God’s Christ), and yet it say, “ with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.”

And the one that sticks out most, “I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”

All these seem to be talking about our works, don’t they? The answer is, “Yes, they are!”

Remember when you were kids (for some that is easier than others)? You were throwing a football around in the house, broke a lamp, got in trouble and grounded for two months for it, and were finally forgiven. Did you go back to throwing a football in the living room?

You kissed your best friend’s guy, only he talked about it. While he bragged about it, she broke up with him and did not talk to you for almost two years. Things finally got better and she forgave you. But, when her new boyfriend wanted to take you out, did you go?

In the same way, if you are a Christian, forgiven for your sins, do you go back to doing them again?

You know what the cost of your forgiveness is, do you flaunt it by planning sins, by willfully continuing in them?

A friend has promised to pay for your dinner at a nice restaurant, the menu choices are pretty expensive, but some are really astronomical. What do you choose on the menu? Yes, he told you to order anything, “don’t worry about the cost!” You still look at the prices while making your decision, don’t you? In fact, if you are like I am, those prices may even color the choice you ultimately make.

It is true that the good Christian life before God is confessing our sins and faith which trusts in the work of Christ for forgiveness. But it is also true that faith will produce good works in us. Faith, God’s work in us, is manifested in how we live our lives in fear, love, and trust toward God. It is also manifested in how we live in love toward our neighbor.

Owners of an orchard will do what is necessary to get a particular tree to produce apples, but after of few years of no fruit, it is simply taking up space. There will come a time when the owner of the orchard will cut down that tree and replace if for lack of fruit.

That is the lesson Paul gives of the Israelites in the wilderness. They had the same spiritual blessings, but with ***MOST OF THEM*** God was not pleased and they were overthrown in the wilderness.

You have been baptized into Christ. Once you step outside the doors of this sanctuary, is God pleased with your life?

You come to the table of the Lord, you eat spiritual food, you partake of the Body and Blood of Christ? Once you step outside the doors of this sanctuary, God pleased with your life?

If while you are confessing your sins you intend to go back and do the same all over again, are you truly repentant? If you come to the altar and are there receiving the Body and Blood of Christ for the forgiveness of those sins you are, while you are waiting for the cup, planning to go out and do again, is there truly forgiveness?

Dearly beloved of God, I know my sins! I know the thoughts which plague me daily! I know the desires which assault my mind! I know the cravings that the world throws before me, Satan expecting me to succumb to them, and fall into sin! And yes, there are days that I do. There are days that you do as well.

What happens then? We know our sin, it is ever before us. What will you do?

Will you confess it, pray God to keep you from doing it again and to assist you in resisting temptation, even as trust that ***AGAIN*** it is forgiven by God in Christ Jesus?

Or, will you fall into the world’s ideas that your sin isn’t so bad. God certainly understands that there are worse things you could be doing, so you excuse it and continue on it it?

I know that it appears that Paul is talking about himself – and maybe other pastors when he says, “*But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”* But he is talking about all Christians. We are all to be holding on another accountable. We are all to be speaking the Word of the Gospel to one another. We are all to be “preachers” of Christ to our family, friends, and neighbors.

And yes, we are to be refraining from sin. Our lives are to be different, we are to be living witnesses in all that we do so that people look at us and see that we are different, that there is something “godly” about our life. It should be evident to others that we are not like everyone else, that Christ does dwell within us. Is that what people say about you?

Even in the church true believers look different. All those with Moses in the wilderness were Jews, they were all the Old Testament church. Church membership did not matter. It is what they believed, and how that faith was lived out in their lives.

In Christ’s church there are many who would like to follow some other path than the one which God proclaims we are to follow as members of His body. We are even warned that *the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires,* *and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.* (2 Tim. 4:3-4)

You are not to be like them. We do not want to be disqualified. We have God’s grace in Christ Jesus, let us live in it!

When we come into God’s house, we are here because we know we’re sinners. We gather to be forgiven. And by God’s grace, we are. But aren’t God’s gifts supposed to build and strengthen faith? Faith should lead to a different life and works appropriate to that faith.

We are baptized into Christ, into His death and His resurrection. As we have put our sinful nature to death in Christ, we should live a new life. That new life does not begin in heaven, it begins here. That new life is a life that is a reflection of the perfection we’ve been given from Christ.

You heard the absolution, the word of forgiveness spoken at the command of Christ. Do you remember what Jesus said to the repentant woman? “Your sin is forgiven.” But He did not stop there, he also proclaimed to her, “Go and sin no more.”

What will you eat and drink today? Will you eat the spiritual food that is Christ? Will you drink the spiritual drink, which is Christ?

Yes, you will. You will know again the forgiveness that is yours in Christ. You know the painful sacrifice by which that forgiveness was purchased. You know the precious means of Word and Sacrament though which that forgiveness is given to you, so that you might be sealed unto eternal salvation in the precious gifts of Word and Sacrament.

So, you are invited today – to hear and, to eat, and to drink. You are invited to partake of the very forgiveness Christ desires to give unto you. What are you going to do with it? Live in it – lest you should be disqualified – unto life everlasting.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.