

Intro: Summary of Love’s Actions from 1 Corinthians 8-9

- Love Builds Up
- Love Lays Down
- Love Enters In
- Today, Love Presses Forward

The characteristic of love, empowered by God for the purpose of the flourishing of humanity, is the quality of self-sacrifice. Love lays down its freedoms, its rights, its comforts, in order to build others up.

It takes the lower position, underneath others, so that it might see others be strengthened, built up, and move from weakness to freedom in Christ

It enters into another’s world, sacrificing its comforts, its leisure, its perceived control, in order to gain those within that world by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ

It lays down its pretense and is willing to be seen as weak, helpless, without any cause for boasting

“Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to your cross I cling.”

1. Love Presses Forward Through Deliberate Self-Sacrifice

a. Example of Athletes

- i. Corinth was host to the Isthmian Games, second in glory only to the Athenian Olympic games
 1. The Corinthians would have known about the sacrifices and efforts made by the athletes in order to compete
 2. The games were a very important part of 1st Century Roman life: “The masses demanded only two things of the political establishment of the day: bread and games. In the day they stood about idle. In the evening they watched the games.” (Juvenal, Roman poet)
- ii. Paul’s main analogy is that athletes lay down their rights and freedoms willingly *for the joy of the prize*
 1. We are to “run in such a way as to seize the prize”!

b. “So, I don’t run aimlessly.”

- i. He is running with a purpose, an intent to “win the prize”, by casting off the glories of this world and the freedoms and rights which have been given to him *for the sake of an imperishable crown*.
- ii. He has his eyes fixed on this tape: the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.
 1. Philippians 3:13-14

c. “I don’t box the air”

- i. This isn’t “shadow boxing”, a training method to become a better fighter
- ii. Rather, he is saying he doesn’t go into the competitive ring and display punches with no intent of landing them on his opponent
 1. No, instead he says, “I punch my own body in the face (literal translation), making it my slave...”
 2. Very graphic image of what the Corinthians would have seen, when a vanquished fighter’s eyes were so swollen that he could no longer fight and would raise his hand in surrender.

- iii. This surrender is what Paul is intending for his own affections, heart and body, in regards to laying down his rights for the sake of the gospel.
 - 1. This is violence, not against people, but against the sinful affections of my heart.
 - 2. Friends, love is warfare against your selfish desires, your wants, even your liberties.
 - 3. It is brutal and bloody, blows to the eye sockets of our yearnings until they raise their hand in defeat, black and blue, with the tears and sweat of prayers of repentance and trusting in the Spirit of God and the sufficiency of Christ and the sovereignty of the Father.
 - a. God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power, love, and self-discipline. (2 Timothy 1:6-12!)
 - b. Any “self-help” method, or “healing”, which tries to circumvent this laborious, difficult, self-denying, Christ-reliant, prayerful, dependent, brutal, tearful, agonizing training is no good to your soul.
 - i. In fact, the word “athlete” here is the word *agonizomai*, “one who contends, struggles, agonizes”
 - ii. To come to Christ Jesus is to come to a cross, and to daily take up the shame of laying down your rights, building others up at your expense, leaning hard on God (“I can only do what I see my Father doing”), and sacrificing your reputation and comforts in the eyes of men for the goal that is set before you.
- d. Paul didn’t want to be known for the letters that he wrote, the rhetorical brilliance that he used, the sacrifices that he made, the people whom he rubbed shoulders with, the chains which he wore or the influence which he had.
 - i. He wanted Christ Jesus, to know Him
 - ii. “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” (Galatians 6:14)
 - iii. “But [Jesus] said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)
 - iv. “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith-- that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.” (Philippians 3:7-11)

2. Love Presses Forward to the Goal: the Joy of the Imperishable Prize

- a. This training has a GOAL: the *obtaining of the joy set before it* – the PRIZE
 - i. It is the prize that motivates the athlete to train hard, to forgo comforts, to give up freedoms, to beat his body into submission.
 - ii. If athletes give up such freedoms and lay down their rights for the joy of a prize that fades away, drying up like a three-week old Christmas wreath, how much more should we lay down our freedoms for a prize that will never fade?
- b. “Run in such a way as to obtain the prize!”
 - i. This is the “how” we are to run, to labor, to live our lives

- ii. Live with such self-control and self-sacrifice for the sake of obtaining the prize
 - c. The battle of self-control (self-rule, "*ego+kratos*" = "self + rule") does not take place in the realm of the will, but in the realm of the affections
 - i. We *will* what we *want* – this is why the words of self-control are always affective (God so loved...for the joy set before Him...take delight in...)
 - ii. The struggle of addiction and the things which we usually categorize as the issues of a loss of self-control is a struggle because it is a battle of *wants or desires*, what the old puritans called "affections".
 - 1. Thus, willpower is not the issue, *what I want* is the struggle
 - 2. I wish I didn't want ice cream so much, I wish I didn't "over-desire" it
 - a. "over-desire" is, in fact, the biblical word usually translated "lust"
 - b. And over-desire is an idolatry, it's not that the object of our desire is necessarily bad in and of itself, but that we want it *too much, inordinately* that makes it sinful and destructive
 - c. Food is good. Too much love of food (for too much or for too little) is destructive.
 - d. Thus, while choice and will are a part of actions, it is the desire/affections that are at the root of acting well, of self-control and self-sacrifice.
 - i. So Paul speaks of "beating his body" is not talk of literally punching himself in the face, but of taking every effort to take his affections off of the lesser prizes and place them on the highest prize: the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.
 - ii. Whatever you set your affections upon, or your heart upon, you will have self-control to obtain, protect, or gain it.
 - 1. It is your love of the prize which enables you to discipline yourself and endure.
 - a. Genesis 29:20 – "So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her."
 - iii. Another way of looking at it is backwards: you can tell what a person really loves, what their highest desire and affection is for, by looking at what they will discipline themselves to obtain.
 - 1. A man may say that he loves his family more than anything, but if he's always late coming home to finish up at work, or always shirking family events to close a deal, then his affections are really set on career success. That's his prize.
 - 2. What one *devotes* himself to is his prize.
 - a. What is your prize?
 - i. Our prizes shift.
 - ii. Our prizes are often lesser things.
 - iii. Our hearts are deceitful, they trick us into thinking that some things are more worthy than they really are: that good things are the ultimate thing.
 - b. This is why we need the incarnate Son of God!
3. How Do I Fix My Eyes on the Prize that is Imperishable?
 - a. We must fix our eyes on the beauty of Christ Jesus until the things of this earth grow strangely dim...
 - b. Jesus is God's love personified. In Him God entered into our created flesh, our dire cursed brokenness caused by our own sin and rebellion against Him, to build us up by laying down in our death. And it is Jesus who pressed on to the goal of glorifying His Father with perfect

submission and obedience, even to death on a cross, so that he might gather many sons and daughters to glory.

- c. It is in Christ Jesus that we know God's love, for this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to the propitiation for our sins, and not only for ours, but for the entire world.
 - i. God loved. God sent. Jesus died as a substitute for our evil. Thus, in Him we are built up. Jesus didn't give up. Jesus didn't give in. Love pressed forward to finish what He started, bringing all that His Father had given Him on to glory.
 - ii. "It is finished." - *Tetelestai*
- d. Hebrews 12 – “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. (Heb 12:1-3 ESV)
- e. It was “for the joy set before Him”
 - i. It was not will-power that gave Jesus the endurance to run the race before Him, to lay down everything that would deviate Him from His purpose.
 - ii. It was joy-power that led him to laugh at the shame, to endure the suffering, to lay His rights down.
 - iii. It was finishing His race that led to being seated at the right hand of God – exchanging the praise of man for the praise of His Father.
 - iv. It is in seeing Him, beholding His joyful endurance, His endurance from sinners and the hostility of the mockers against Himself, which empowers us to self-mastery, to love well to the end as we set our sights on the prize.
- f. What was His joy?
 - i. It was redeeming a people for Himself!
 1. He had the Father before the incarnation
 2. He had power and glory and dominion
 3. He didn't lack anything!
 - ii. He set His joy on redeeming sinners for His Father, for YOU are His delight and joy which caused Him to endure such suffering and hostility.
 1. “For God so loved...”
 - a. He didn't NEED us, but He LOVES us!
 2. YOU are His Rachel!
 - a. It is love that labors to the end
 - b. It is love that lays aside its rights and its comforts
 - c. It is love that moves mountains to obtain its prize – and Christ Jesus is the personification of love – all the way through shameful wrath-bearing cross, to justify you wretched sinners and call you His beloved bride.
That's what love is.

Conclusion: It is in seeing His great delight in you, the love that laid down His glorious comforts and rights in order to build you up, that entered into our world of sin and darkness and depravity to serve it, and that pressed forward through the suffering of betrayal, lovelessness, loneliness, pain, violent beatings, and death by crucifixion, even bearing the weight of all of God's holy righteous wrathful vengeance against evil He Himself bore for us *because the joy of our redemption was worth it to Him*

When you see this great love for you, it will enliven your love for Him, and this love for Him, this joy in Him, this setting of your greatest affections upon Him, is what enables you to love well, too

Joy empowers self-control – the prize, the prize, the prize – I want Christ, and to know Christ is my greatest joy – then you will move mountains and lay down rights to obtain such a glorious wreath on that great and final day when your beloved proclaims, “Well done! My good and faithful servant. Enter into my joy!”

“The best we can hope for in this life is a knothole peek at the shining realities ahead. Yet a glimpse is enough. It's enough to convince our hearts that whatever sufferings and sorrows currently assail us aren't worthy of comparison to that which waits over the horizon.” ~Joni Eareckson Tada

Keep your eyes on the horizon – the Son of God is gloriously good and His first advent revealed the depths of His love, and His second advent will make all our deaths worth it!