

The things Paul did to discipline his body

"I discipline my body and keep it under control, ..." I Cor. 9:27

Part I

A discipline is a training activity that helps to shape and force character over an extended period. Spiritual discipline is the "strict training" that promote spiritual growth. They are habits that have been practiced by God's people since time begin. That is what Paul was talking about in 1 Corinthians 9:27.

Here are several things Paul practiced regularly so as not to disqualify himself as he preached to others.

Private time

Immediately following Paul's conversion, he withdrew into the wilderness for a time (Galatians 1:16-17). This extended retreat was marked by solitude in which Paul meditated intensely on God's Word and spent much time in prayer. This was when he received his gospel message "by revelation from Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:12). This "alone time" equipped him for the lifetime of service that has impacted the world of religion.

Prayer

Paul mentioned that he was given a thorn in his flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7). We are never told anything specific about the thorn. But we are given the specifics of Paul's response to the thorn: Paul prayed. In fact, he prayed three times concerning this thorn like Jesus prayed three times in the Garden of Gethsemane about His suffering (Matthew 26:36-45). When Paul prayed, God answered him clearly, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Prayer didn't bring Paul the answer he was looking for, but prayer brought him the strength and reassurance he needed.

Service

We see Paul's practice of service as he committed himself "to preach the gospel where Christ was not known" (Romans 15:20). He made countless sacrifices for the sake of the gospel as well (2 Corinthians 11:23-33). We see by this that the practice of service set the agenda for Paul's life.