

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

Running To Win

By Chris Simmons

Many of us watch the Olympics every four years and become inspired by the stories of those who have devoted every aspect of their lives for years upon years just to have the opportunity to compete in the game or competition they have chosen. We ought to be impressed by the daily sacrifices and consistent focus and dedication displayed by these athletes so that they might have the chance to be victorious and receive a prize. Those who succeed no doubt have some degree of God-given talent, but they are also those who sacrifice the most and work the hardest. The apostle Paul not only appreciated athletic endeavors and understood what was necessary to succeed in such contests but more importantly he taught the parallel applications of athletic competitions to our spiritual lives. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, *“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.”*

We must focus on the prize. One thing that struck Paul was that athletes who go through all they do to win the prize, do so for something that won't last but for a little while. The prize for the champions at the Greek Athletic Festival or the Isthmian Festival (held every two years at the Isthmus, about eight miles from, and in full view of, the city of Corinth) was a wreath or a crown made of olive or pine leaves. Paul described it as a *“perishable”* or *“corruptible”* prize and at best, would last just a few days. One must realize that even the gold medals won in our modern Olympics, though enduring longer than a wreath, will also perish one day (2 Pet. 3:10-12). What we are to strive for is described as an *“imperishable”* prize that will never fade away. Peter described our hope as being one which is *“imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away”* (1 Pet. 1:4). The point we must take away from this is that our effort, diligence, discipline, and determination should and must exceed that of the Olympic athlete because of the nature of the prize we aim for – because of what's at stake. When we compare our efforts to study, pray, worship, and serve, does it come anywhere close to the training efforts of the Olympic athlete? When we contrast our spiritual discipline and our focus on the goal before us to that of the Olympic athlete, do we see any difference? It is our responsibility to not just run the Christian race, but to run in such a way that we might win. We must keep focused on the spiritual goals before us (Heb. 12:1-2).

We must “run in such a way” to win. The Greek word for *“win”* means *“to make it your own”* (Thayer's Greek Lexicon). This is what Paul had in mind when he wrote in Philippians 3:12-14, *“Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”* Paul took personal responsibility to *“press on”* so that he could indeed *“lay hold”* or *“win”* the prize – to make it his own. Running with anything other than all we have to give is simply inadequate. As the expression goes in sports today, we've got to leave it all on the field because there is no silver medal when it comes to our eternal destiny. The point is not that there will only be one to go to heaven or that we're to view our brethren and neighbors in the world as our competition, but the point is about the effort of our Christian race. Our life as a child of God is to be run in the same way that an Olympic athlete approaches his effort to win the prize.

We must compete. Spiritually speaking, according to *W. E. Vine*, the Greek word for *“compete”* means *“to contend perseveringly against opposition...engage in conflict...to strive as in a contest for a prize, straining every nerve to attain the object...put forth every effort.”* We don't run this race unopposed as we have a worthy and committed adversary seeking to defeat. We must soberly face the truth that our adversary the devil continually seeks to destroy and devour us (1 Pet. 5:7). As we run this race, know that Satan is doing everything possible to trip us up, discourage us, or simply distract us from our goal. We must be continually cognizant of Satan and his schemes and tactics which include: (1) to get us to never begin the race; (2) to get us to quit running if we started or (3) to simply get us to run lackadaisically – no longer putting forth every effort or straining every nerve. An athlete's first obstacle in his or her competition is in the mind – bringing every thought into captivity of the goal before them – and solely thinking about the right things. So is the case spiritually. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 10:5 as he addressed the subject of our spiritual warfare that we must be *“taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”* He wrote to the Philippians in Philippians 4:8 of the need to restrict our thoughts to *“...whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good re-*

pute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell (think) on these things.” Our thoughts lead to our actions and our ability to faithfully compete and overcome.

We must exercise self-control. We are commanded to develop and grow self-control in our lives (2 Pet. 1:6; Gal. 5:23). Olympic athletes can't eat whatever they want or do whatever they want (Titus 2:12). They can't take days off from their training (2 Cor. 4:16). They can't be distracted (Matt. 13:22; Lk. 14:18-22; 2 Tim. 2:4). They must learn to say no to things that are not wrong in and of themselves (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23). They must surround themselves with those who support and encourage their training efforts and avoid those who would discourage them (1 Cor. 15:33; 1 Thess. 5:14). There are things they must both flee and pursue (1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22). They must pay with diligent labor and great personal sacrifice (1 Cor. 15:58; Lk. 9:23). As these passages teach, our pursuit of our heavenly goal requires nothing less. Again, victorious athletes do all these things for a crown that will not last. Will we do so for that which will last forever?

Olympic athletes train and exercise the way they do because they want to. They devote themselves because the reward is worth the cost. They know they have no right to expect the prize without it. We also have no right to expect the crown of life without such daily devotion, dedication, and sacrifice. In contrast to the athlete who has no promise of a gold medal if they do all they can to prepare; we can be assured of heaven (2 Tim. 4:7-8) if we continually give the Lord all that we have to give. – *Fifth Street East Church of Christ Bulletin*, August 21, 2016. ■

Some Things To Consider Regarding Worship

We are commanded to worship according to the divine will of the Lord (Col. 3:17; Acts 17:16-31). Worship that is displeasing to God includes: (1) *“vain worship”* (Matt. 15:7-9); (2) *“ignorant worship”* (Acts 17:22-23; Rom. 10:1-4); and, (3) *“will worship”* (Col. 2:20-23; Matt. 7:21-23). God demands, *“in spirit and in truth”* worship (Jn. 4:23-24). But, what are some things we should consider in order to benefit most from our worship to God? Please consider these points:

(1) PREPARE YOUR MIND through prayer before coming to the place of worship! Christians are commanded to *“pray without ceasing”* (1 Thess. 5:17). It would be well to pray for the preacher, teachers, song leaders and all who lead us in worship. We should pray that all saints be edified, that sinners be smitten in heart resulting in obedience to the gospel of Christ (Col. 4:2-4; Rom. 10:1). We should pray that erring brethren repent; that the truth be boldly spoken and received by those with an *“honest and good heart”* (Lk. 8:15; Eph. 6:18-20). Pray at home BEFORE the assembly!

(2) PREPARE BIBLE LESSONS BEFOREHAND! Christians are commanded to study (2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Tim. 4:13-16). This means doing some homework regarding Bible study! We don't think it strange to do homework for school, college classes or other interests. Why do some think it strange when asked to do extra study to teach a Bible class, prepare a lesson or to fill in when the preacher is sick or out of town?

(3) BE PRESENT AT EVERY opportunity to study the Bible! We are commanded to not forsake *“the assembling of the saints”* (Heb. 10:25). Saints of the first century were involved in daily study of the scriptures (Acts 2:41-47; 17:11; 20:5-7). We should be present for gospel meetings, regularly scheduled worship services, Bible Study classes and necessary meetings of the congregation we are joined to.

(4) BE ON TIME for the Bible Study and Worship assembly! Promptness is expected and practiced in worldly matters, why not for worship? We need to be on time so that we can greet visitors and other members. Being on time shows respect for the occasion, whereas tardiness indicates lack of proper preparation and disrespect (Matt. 25:1-13).

(5) ASSEMBLE TO BE EDIFIED AND TO ENCOURAGE OTHERS in the *“most holy faith”* (Eph. 4:1-16; Heb. 10:24)! We must take an active role in worship. Open your Bible, open your song book, and open your heart and ears and make proper application (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Jas. 1:21; 2 Cor. 13:5-6).

(6) WEAR APPROPRIATE ATTIRE for worship! Remember, we are worshiping God, in His house! Our outward adornment should reflect a meek, humble, respectful and pure heart (1 Pet. 3:3-6; 1 Tim. 2:9-10; Titus 2:1-8). Let our attire reflect the serious nature of worshiping God!

Conclusion: Never forget that we are worshiping the Creator of all things we see; the Father of all and the giver of *“every good gift and every perfect gift”* (Jas. 1:17). Never take lightly the serious nature of the occasion when making preparation to worship the true and living God. I encourage you to strive to make proper preparation, to be present at the appointed time and place to worship, and thereby *“serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear”* (Heb. 12:28). Let us always be mindful that *“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth”* (Jn. 4:24). – *tgmc* ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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