

## COMPETITION 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

**Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.**

Men like competition. However, it is not only a “man-thing” for women can be very competitive also. But give a man a peach basket and an inflated ball and he will invent a game that will captivate millions. In fact, we men have a tendency to be competitive with just about every thing we come across in our daily lives. When I was in college I worked at a foundry making brake drums. The 2<sup>nd</sup> shift, on which I worked, continually bragged about the fact that we almost always produced more brake drums than the first shift. The fact is if you put two guys together it won't be long before they will probably be in some contest.

I am convinced that being competitive is a good thing. Of course it can be taken to extremes, but that is where the idea of self-control comes in. Those who are against any type of competition because it makes the loser “feel bad” simply don't understand the concept. The right type of competition will help build character. I believe God has “programmed” us to be competitive in many ways. The Scriptural references to the competition of races or fights illustrates this.

The Greeks had two great athletic festivals, the Olympic games and the Isthmian games. The Isthmian games were held at Corinth and were therefore very familiar to those to whom Paul was writing. Contestants in the games had to

prove rigorous training for ten months. The last month was spent at Corinth, with supervised daily workouts in the gymnasium and athletic fields.

The race was always a major attraction at the games, and that is the figure Paul uses to illustrate the faithful Christian life. These men would train long and hard because they wanted to win. However out of the large number of runners, only one would win. The major difference between those races and the Christian “race” is that every Christian who will pay the price of careful training can win. We do not compete against each other but against the obstacles that hinder us. In a sense, every Christian runs his own race. Paul therefore encourages each of us to “run in such a way that you may win.”

The prize in the Isthmian games was a pine wreath. It represented, however, fame, acclaim, and the life of a hero. Winners were immortalized, much as they are today. But all of that was perishable. Christians do not run for a short-lived pine wreath or short-lived fame. Our prize is **incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you. 1 Peter 1:4**

What is sad is that while an athlete is often willing to sacrifice a great deal of time and effort and practice extreme personal discipline to win a prize which will be forgotten, at best, in a few years, many Christians are not willing to even begin to get out of their comfort zone for things that are of eternal consequence. Still others may start out well but soon tire of the effort and begin to “break training.”

In the Isthmian games, a contestant who failed to meet the training requirements was disqualified. Notice Paul's statement: *I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.* He did not want to spend his life preaching the requirements to others and then be disqualified for not meeting the requirements himself.

Did Paul practice what he preached? Let's check him

out as he finishes his race.

**I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. 2 Timothy 4:7-8**

Paul's remarks come after a life of commitment and dedication to God. He had no regret, no sense of unfulfillment or incompleteness. After the Lord took control, he truly had lived life to the fullest. There can be no greater satisfaction than to know that you have fully accomplished all that the Lord has called you to do.

How can we live our lives in that way?

## **1. RECOGNIZE YOU ARE IN A SPIRITUAL STRUGGLE**

**...I have fought...**

The word translated *fought* is where we get our English word *agonizing* and *agony*. The words were used to describe athletic contests and other types of struggles that involve great effort and energy. Notice how that same word is used.

**...fight the good fight of faith. 1 Timothy 6:12**

**And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things.**

**To this end I also labor striving according to His working which works in me mightily. Colossians 1:29**

To live as a Christian means you will face resistance.

**For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Ephesians 6:12**

The enemy is subtle and deceptive. Just as a soldier in enemy territory has to be constantly on guard for the enemy, so must we remain alert in our spiritual lives.

**Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil**

**walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 1 Peter 5:8**

## **2. UNDERSTAND YOUR NOBLE CALLING**

**... the good fight...**

Paul recognized that the cause he pursued was noble. There is nothing more important or of greater significance than serving God with our lives. If you are a believer, you have not been saved simply or even primarily for your own sake. You have been saved for the glory of God and to fulfill His holy calling to be His witness to an unsaved world.

**But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness... Matthew 6:33**

## **3. STAY ON COURSE**

**...I have finished the course...**

**But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy... Acts 20:24**

There are two major hindrances that can keep us from finishing our course or race.

**Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. Hebrews 12:1**

- **Weight** - It is not the same thing as sin. A weight is not evil in itself. Normally, it may be harmless or even worthwhile. The danger and harm come when such things hinder our service to Christ. They weigh us down as we are running, they distract our attention when we should be concentrating. They move our focus from the Lord's work to something else and sap energy that should be dedicated entirely to Him.
- **Sin** - It does not just distract us but rather destroys our

strength. If we allow it to continue to infect our life, the Lord Himself may even have to pull us out of the race. There has been many a good man who gave into his fleshly desires and disqualified himself from the race.

The only protection from either one of these is found in the next verse.

**Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2**

#### **4. MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR TIME**

We have only the time allotted by God, and none of us knows when it will run out. Every Christian life runs by God's divine timetable and against His divine clock. We do not know how long He will hold open the door of a given opportunity or of our entire time of service.

**See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Ephesians 5:15-16**

Be careful how you walk. Make the most of your time. God gives us many things without limit - His love, His grace, etc. But His gift of time is strictly measured.

#### **5. TRUST GOD'S WORD TOTALLY**

**...I have kept the faith...**

The keeping of our soul is entirely in God's hand.

**... for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. 2 Timothy 1:12**

It is also through God's power that we can live for Him day to day. However, this is realized in our lives as we trust in His promises continually.

**Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding: In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Proverbs 3:5-6**

*In 1904, William Borden, a member of the Borden dairy family, finished high school in Chicago and was given a world cruise as a graduation present. While traveling through China he became heavily burdened for the lost. When he returned home he went to university and then seminary. While in school, he penned these words in the back of his Bible: **NO RESERVES**. Although his family pleaded with him to take control of the business, he insisted that God's call to the mission field had priority. After disposing of his wealth, he added these words to his Bible: **NO RETREAT**. On his way to china he contracted cerebral meningitis in Egypt and died within a month. After his death, someone looking through his Bible discovered these final words: **NO REGRETS**.*

The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, 2 Timothy

**About this Sermon:** The above is a sermon outline prepared by Pastor Michael Switzer and was preached for the family of believers at Cornerstone Baptist Church, Middletown NY. It is published here for instructional purposes. Although it is copyrighted to protect from abuse or misquotation, it may be quoted in-part or linked freely from other websites. When using more than 33% of the text or if using in any printed format, please contact us for permission. All Bible references from the New King James Version (NKJV). Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ©2006 Cornerstone Baptist Church