

I Buffet My Body ...

"And I do all things for the gospel's sake that I might be a joint partaker thereof. Know ye not that they that run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? Even so run, that ye may attain. and every man that striveth in the games exerciseth self-control in all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, as not uncertainly; so fight I, as not beating the air: but I buffet my body, and bring it under bondage: lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected" (1 Cor. 9:23-27).

Paul continued in these verses to emphasize his refusal to exercise his liberties in his efforts to save others who were lost. In vs. 23 he makes his rejection of his liberties a condition of his sharing in the reward the gospel promised, eternal life.

Having declared his foregoing of his rights (I do *"all things"* for the gospel's sake), he now compares the life of a Christian to the Grecian races so familiar to his Gentile readers. Comparisons help make truths clearer. Jesus' parables were "comparisons" to emphasize "kingdom truths". Consider the following points of similarities between the Grecian races and the race which Christians run.

One must be properly enrolled in the games to participate in them. Paul wrote Timothy, *"And if also a man contend in the games, he is not crowned except he contend lawfully"* (2 Tim. 2:5). It is necessary that a person identify himself with Christ to be acknowledged by Him. At the last day *"many will say unto me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity"* (Mt. 7:22-23). This is a sad picture -- many will be rejected by Christ because Christ did not "know them." Jesus said, *"I know mine own and mine own know me"* (Jn. 10:14). One must become God's child to be "His" and becoming God's child is through an obedient faith, *"Ye are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for as many of you as were baptized into Christ, did put on Christ"* (Gal. 3:26f).

There had to be an incentive to participate in the Grecian games. *"Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown."* The crown of laurel leaves was a symbol of the accomplishment of having won the race and excelled all others. Christians also strive for a crown, but not a corruptible one (1 Cor. 9:6). Christians strive for the *"crown of life,"* also called a *"crown of righteousness"* (Rev. 2:10; 2 Tim. 4:8).

To attain such a crown there was the need for discipline, self-control. Thus he wrote, "... *and everyone that striveth in the games exerciseth self control in all things.*" Paul applied this principle personally: "*I buffet my body and bring it under bondage*" (vss. 25, 27). No athlete eats, sleeps, and functions simply as he has liberty to do. Such would be insane, assuring certain defeat. We may jointly participate in the gospel's promise only through self-control; holding our bodies in check (buffet -- literally, "beat black and blue") abstaining not only from the sinful desires we might have, but denying ourselves rightful things because to exercise our right in those things would either neutralize or destroy altogether our influence with other brethren.

The race not only demands the foregoing three items, being enrolled, incentives, and self-control, it requires steadfast running until the race is completed. Not only had Paul fought a good fight and kept the faith, he had "*finished the course*" (2 Tim. 4:6f). Appeals to steadfastness and constancy abound in the writings all New Testament writers.

In Grecian games one won the race and received the crown. This is not true for those who strive for the incorruptible crown of life. We run, in Paul's words, not uncertainly; not as one who "*beats the air.*" We do not compete with others for this crown of life; the only struggle we have is the "*flesh*" versus the "*spirit.*" "*If ye live after the flesh, ye must die, but if by the spirit ye put to death the deeds of the flesh, ye shall live*" (Rom. 8:13).

Paul's concern that he buffet himself lest he should be "*rejected,*" "*a castaway*" is his somber, terse declaration that it is possible for one who has been saved to so sin, so as to be lost, contrary to the declaration of Calvinists.

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