

Erlo Stegen:

1Corinthians 9 v 24-27:

"Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified."

The Bible is a huge treasure and if we are full to the brim, with the Word, then the Devil cannot find place in us. In this text it says "don't you know ..." It is a pity that many Christians are ignorant. They start out being on fire for God but then they fizzle out. Paul preached in Corinth and the church mushroomed. He taught, disciplined and comforted them. Not all Christians, however, are immovable. They are chameleon Christians - blending in with their surroundings. Such people should seek help because they could end up being disqualified.

Every three years great games were held in Corinth. There were sporting events, wrestling events and fights where the outcome was between life and death. Whoever won received a wreath as a prize. This prize was perishable and not worth anything really.

The athletes who participated were temperate in everything. They practised for a long time and went through a tough training. All this they did for a perishable crown. The athletes of those days, whether wrestling, javelin or other sports, were "temperate in all things" because their eye was upon the prize. They ignored the temptations which would weaken their bodies. They put us Christians to shame. We train ourselves for an imperishable crown and yet we do not want our comfort zones to be disturbed. They left all for this prize and did not want anything to weigh them down. Do we exercise self-control in all things? Do we leave the TV and things that bring lust and the world into our life? Anything that weighs one down, one should take off, Hebrews 12 v 1. Nothing is a greater hindrance than sin e.g. lust of the eyes and lust of the flesh and cursed indifference.

What is the imperishable crown that we want to win? It is heaven with Jesus Christ where there will be no tears, fear or sadness but only joy and peace in His presence. Lazarus did not complain about his suffering but waited for that glory.

Moses was willing to ignore the fantastic offers which came with being in the royal household of Egypt. Instead, "choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward." Heb 11:25 & 26

Remember too, that the athletes in Paul's day, were competing for first-prize in their event. There was only one winner's wreath. But as true believers, who "run to win", we can all win the prize.

When time is no more and we enter into eternity we must have the assurance that Jesus was everything to us. How terrible if a person stands before Him weighed down with the "fleeting pleasures" of this world and is "disqualified" (1Cor 9:27) for the prize. That prize is Jesus Christ Himself, living with Him forever. Repent and lay off everything that weighs you down, (any weight and "the sin which easily entangles"), for the eternal crown.