

Illustrations from Athletic Competition
(1 Corinthians 9:24-25)

Introduction:

1. The Olympic Games have received a great amount of attention recently.
2. Athletes from all over the world have been competing in different events.
3. Perhaps this is a good time for us to examine several passages that mention athletic competition.
4. In the verses we are studying, athletic competition is used to illustrate 3 important lessons:
 - a. Christians must practice temperance
 - b. Christians must keep the rules
 - c. Christians must exercise patience.
5. Let us begin by showing that . . .

Discussion:

- I. CHRISTIANS MUST PRACTICE TEMPERANCE (1 Corinthians 9:24-25)
 - A. These verses mention "running a race."
 1. The race under consideration is probably a "marathon" [a long distance race].
 2. An athlete would run a race like this for one main reason -- to win it.
 - a. He wants to receive the prize that is given to the winner of the race.
 - b. Prizes have changed over the years.
 - 1) In the ancient games, athletes who won races received a crown of leaves, similar to a small wreath.
 - 2) Today, athletes who win races receive a gold medal.
 - 3) Regardless of whether the prize is a crown of leaves or a gold medal, it is still "*corruptible*" [it will not last forever].
 3. Before an athlete can win a race and receive a prize, he has to do 2 things.
 - a. For one thing, he has to enter the race.
 - b. For another thing, he must practice "temperance."
 4. In practicing temperance, an athlete:
 - a. avoids things that are harmful, even though they may be enjoyable [such things will prevent him from winning the race]
 - b. does things that are helpful, even though they may not be enjoyable [he does such things because they will help him to win the race].
 - B. Paul mentioned "running a race" to illustrate several principles that relate to Christianity.
 1. The main objective in Christianity is to receive an "*incorruptible*" crown.
 - a. This prize is also called:
 - 1) "*a crown of righteousness*" (2 Timothy 4:8)
 - 2) "*a crown of glory*" (1 Peter 5:4)
 - 3) "*a crown of life*" (Revelation 2:10).
 - b. The crown given to those who complete the Christian race is an eternal home in heaven.
 2. Let us notice 2 things we must do to receive this crown.
 - a. First, we must enter the race (Acts 2:37-38, 41, 47).
 - b. After entering the race, we must practice "temperance" so we can finish.
 3. In practicing temperance, Christians:
 - a. must avoid things such as "*the works of the flesh*" because they will keep a person out of heaven (Galatians 5:19-21)
 - b. must bear "*the fruit of the Spirit*" (Galatians 5:22-23) and develop "the Christian graces" (2 Peter 1:5-7).
 4. Notice how temperance is also emphasized in Romans 12:1-2.
 - C. Paul used "running a race" to illustrate the important role that temperance plays in Christianity.
 - D. In addition to practicing temperance, . . .

- II. CHRISTIANS MUST KEEP THE RULES (2 Timothy 2:5)
 - A. We understand that an athlete must abide by the rules for his sport.
 - 1. He cannot win unless he keeps the rules.
 - 2. An athlete that does not follow the rules will be disqualified.
 - B. According to this verse, we must live by God's rules to receive a crown.
 - 1. God's rules are not:
 - a. determined by each person (Proverbs 14:12)
 - b. the commandments of men (Matthew 15:9)
 - c. found in the Law of Moses (Colossians 2:14).
 - 2. God's rules for Christians are found in the New Testament (James 1:25).
 - C. Jesus summed up this matter of living by God's rules in Matthew 7:13-14.
 - D. For our last point, let us notice that . . .
- III. CHRISTIANS MUST EXERCISE PATIENCE (Hebrews 12:1-3)
 - A. To be successful, an athlete must have "*patience*" [endurance].
 - 1. He must endure hardship while he is training to compete.
 - 2. If he lacks endurance he will not complete his race, and he cannot win.
 - B. Christians must run the race that is set before us "*with patience.*"
 - C. Certain things will help us to exercise patience.
 - 1. Encouragement is available from the cloud of witnesses listed in ch.11.
 - 2. We must lay aside anything that will hinder us.
 - 3. We must keep our eyes focused on Jesus -- He finished His race and received His reward.

Conclusion:

- 1. Have you entered the greatest race of all, the Christian race?
- 2. If you have, :
 - a. are you practicing temperance?
 - b. are you keeping the rules?
 - c. are you exercising patience?
- 3. By following these guidelines we can have the confidence that Paul had (see 2 Timothy 4:7-8).