

What Can We Learn from 1st Century Athletes?
(1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

Introduction:

1. This evening, some great athletes will be competing in a football game known as the Super Bowl.
2. Perhaps this is a good time for us to examine several passages that mention athletes who competed in the 1st century.
3. In the verses we are studying, athletes from long ago are mentioned to help us understand the importance of 3 activities, including:
 - a. practicing temperance
 - b. keeping the rules
 - c. having patience.
4. These activities are essential for Christians, as well as athletes.
5. Let us begin by showing that . . .

Discussion:

I. LIKE ATHLETES, CHRISTIANS MUST PRACTICE TEMPERANCE

- A. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 we read about "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 mentioned athletes who "ran a race" in the 1st century to illustrate the important role that temperance plays in Christianity.
- D. This brings us to our next point.
- II. LIKE ATHLETES, 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. This brings us to our final point.
- III. LIKE ATHLETES, CHRISTIANS MUST HAVE 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 expressed in 2 Timothy 4:7-8.