

What Can We Learn from 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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.