

Fruitfulness Explained: John 15.1-8

Christ wants to abide in my actions

As Paul sat to write the words we will read this morning, he may have glanced out the window of his room along the busy streets of Corinth, watching the flow of athletes relentlessly pursuing Greek athletic glory. Each day they devotedly streamed into the Greek gymnasiums to train their minds and bodies to be completely given over to mastery of their sport at the local Isthmian Games that fed the Olympic Games of the 1st Century.

Paul lived in the land of the Olympics. Paul lived and worked each day among the sights and sounds of athletes that were a part of the already ancient tradition of Olympic Games. In the middle of the 1st Century as Paul served in Corinth just outside of Athens, he was writing about sports. The Olympics were already ancient as he wrote, having been launched for over 800 years; tens of thousands of spectators had made their way to the Games and no doubt had passed Paul on the roads of Greece.

Those same Olympic Games are upon us. On Friday August 13th 2004 the world looked again for the best at Athens as the Games began. For 2800 years (except for the lapse from the 5th century to the 19th century) the world has equated the Olympic Games with the best of the best. Human bodies that have been mastered by a disciplined mind to run, jump, swim and perform extraordinarily well in athletic contests.

Anyone, including Paul, who lived in Greece in the 1st Century had seen many athletes in either practice or performance. Comparing the best of the best in sports, Paul exhorts those early followers of Jesus to participate in the Christian life the way that the Greeks competed in the Olympic races. As Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans from Corinth in the middles of the 1st century AD he only had to look out his window to use profoundly Olympic terms. In Romans 12.1-2 Paul write about a body presented in unreserved devotion to Christ. He says give your body to Christ; keep Him in control; fight anything that hinders you from pleasing Him. He used a blend of worship ideas (a sacrifice offered) and athletic

images (a living body devoted) to convey the way we are to look upon life for Christ while we live on earth.

I went to school with an Olympic athlete. All through Junior High and High School we all noticed the red faced young skater with a perpetual runny nose. She awoke and was taken to the skating rink every morning, seven days a week, by her parents – at 4 AM. There she skated for three hours every morning. Her red nose, sinus problems and weariness at school each day reminded all of us of the devotion she had for skating. She always told us that someday we would see her in the Olympic figure skating competitions. She wanted with every fiber of her being for her body to SKATE!

Open with me to Romans 12:1-2. We are looking at the fourth area of our lives that Jesus wants. We have seen in weeks past that Jesus wants to abide in our time; He wants to abide in our treasures; and that He wants to abide in our attitudes. This morning – Jesus wants to abide in our actions. Please stand with me as we read God's Word.

Romans 12:1-2 **I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies** (Those words frames what I would call our invitation to the ultimate games – living life for the Glory of God).

a living sacrifice, (total devotion)

holy, (set apart) **acceptable to God**, (obedient to Him)

which is your reasonable service. (the true offering of devotion and worship is our body in service to Jesus)

And do not be conformed to this world, (resist the breaking of any of the rules the Heavenly Umpire has laid down for your life)

but be transformed (get in shape, cut the junk, work out until you are able to compete regularly)

by the renewing of your mind, (exercised each day for godliness and fruitfulness)

that you may prove (experience and win for your life's work)

what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Get the gold medal at Christ's Bema Seat!)

Pray

This morning God expects fruit in the life of His children. That fruit comes from a good heart. That good heart is made good by God in a process called the new birth.

Fruitfulness explained in John 15.1-8

The God of Heaven says I am in the business of producing crops. When my Word gets into your life something is going to happen. When you allow me full access – amazing results will come.

God has outlined for us in His Word the four areas He watches, remembers and will someday test for fruitfulness. Do you know them? Are you cultivating these four areas each day for His Glory? What does God call time, possessions, attitudes, and actions in our lives that are harnessed and used and deposited before Him in Heaven? FRUIT. Fruit Consists of inviting Jesus into each area of my life and letting Him take it over.

CHRIST WANTS TO ABIDE IN MY TIME:

Remember the river of our life flowing by at 60 minutes an hour? This is all about how we use, how we prioritize, and how we spend our moments.

Has God said anything about that time? Yes – Seek Me FIRST (Matthew 6.33). Jesus wants to be welcomed into all of my time. That is what abide means, He wants to “stay” with you – get up each morning and eat with you, go out to the car and ride with you, sit at your desk while you work, go to lunch, ride home and spend the evening with you. He wants you to notice Him, talk to Him, and let Him be a part of your life.

CHRIST WANTS TO ABIDE IN MY TREASURES:

This is what we do with our money. This is how we view our possessions.

Has God said anything about those treasures? Yes – Jesus actually said much about money, the summary would be in two passages -- (Matthew 6:19-21 lay not up) and Luke 12 be rich towards God!

CHRIST WANTS TO ABIDE IN MY ATTITUDES:

This is what we do with our minds. This is how we relate to life and people.

Has God said anything about that mind? Yes –

- **HE WANTS TO CAPTIVATE MY THOUGHTS.** 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, ***bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,***
- **HE WANTS TO DRAW MY AFFECTIONS:** Colossians 3:1-2 If then you were raised with Christ, ***seek those things which are above,*** where

Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

- **HE WANTS TO TRANSFORM MY PERSONALITY:** Scriptures show us in Galatians 5:22-23— when God’s Spirit is at the helm, there is a remarkable change in our homes, churches, and lives. We see that as believers we are in the same family—God is our Father. We are headed toward a common goal—heaven. We serve a common Master—Jesus. We follow the same Guide—His Word. And share the same passion—that Christ gets all the glory. So in our lives the anointing of the Holy Spirit is the **moment-by-moment** appropriation of God’s power over the pests that irritate and nag us in life. Only the Holy Spirit can free us from frustrations and irritations. Only the Holy Spirit can quiet us and bring us to contentment.

CHRIST WANTS TO ABIDE IN MY ACTIONS: What we do with our bodies. Has God said anything about that body? Yes --

- Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And **do not be conformed** (imperative) to this world, but **be transformed** (imperative) by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.
- Hebrews 12:1–2 “**Wherefore seeing we have encircling us** [*echontes perikeimenon hēmin*. The stadium/circus crowd of saints and prophets encircles the athletes competing in their contest] **so great a cloud of witnesses, let us put off all bulk weight, and the loosely fitting sin** [Greek athletes competed in the nude], **and let us run with patience the race** [*agōna* The *agon* signified the setting where the games were held or the assembly of spectators.] **that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus, the leader** [*archēgon*] **and finisher** [*teleiōtēn*] **of the faith.**” [Christ ran and finished the race before us, and yet he is also in some sense above the games, governing them, and the one in whose honor and by whose beneficence the competition of faith is held, like many of the great provincial or city magistrates who served as *agōnothetēs*. The meanings of *archēgos* as “magistrate or ruler” and “first or initiator” are compatible and offer a double meaning in the context of the games. Not only does Jesus start the runner on his course, but also he demonstrated how the race was won.]¹

Paul then singles out four of the original events of those Olympic Games as the model of our lives in Christ.

¹ Various, *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press) 2000.

Remember our context is the world of the New Testament? In order to participate in the Greek games², the athlete had to be a citizen. He did not run the race to gain his citizenship. In Philippians 3:20, Paul reminds us that "our conversation [citizenship] is in Heaven." Because we are already the children of God through faith in Christ, we have the responsibility of "running the race" and achieving the goals God has set for us.

All of the metaphors Paul uses for the Christian life allude to opposing forces we struggle [*agonidzoma*] against. Hence, his word pictures of warfare, races, struggles, and building. So all of life is a struggle [an agony] to please Christ.

The entire New Testament description of the life of a believer in the world reads like a many-sided picture of the Olympic Games. Think with me of the pictures of the Games and their spiritual counterparts:

We live life in **the arena** [Greek *stadion*] of faith,
[holiness is] **the training** [of our bodies to obey Him],
[God offers His Spirit's power to build us in] **the self-control**,
[we learn] the ruthless denial of self,
[His Word is] **the herald** [that signals what we are to do]
[each day is] **the entrance** to the racecourse,
[life's circumstances are] **the different kinds of contests**,
[we all are participating in] **the racing to the goal**,
[our flesh must be constantly receiving] **the boxing**,
[the world and the demons meet us for] **the wrestling**,
[we must remember God's Word as it tells us] **the rules of the combats**,
[always remembering that] Christ [is] **the umpire**,
[constantly we remind ourselves of] **the danger** of being disqualified,
[always enduring for the supreme purpose of] **the appearance** of the victor
before the exalted Throne of the Divine Judge on the great day of the
distribution of prizes.

It is out of His hands **the victors** will receive the wreath and the palm.

The list of the victors [is] 'the Book of Life',

[Christ's Coming for us is] **the triumphal entry** in the homeland,

[the marriage supper of the Lamb is] **the banquet**, [and the] **the festival**,

[crowns to cast before Him are] **the gifts**,

[standing and bowing in worship around His Throne on the Sea of Glass is] **the place of honor**-- in fact, scarcely one essential feature of the whole course of

² There were also three other chief games: throwing the discus (Gk. diskobolia); throwing the spear (Gk. akontismos); and jumping (Gk. halma). Often jumping, spear-throwing, quoit-throwing, racing, and wrestling were united and formed the so-called "five-fold contest" (Gk. pentathlon). He who conquered in this was especially honored. With the 25th Olympiad began chariot racing, with two or four horses. Then horse racing was introduced. There was a race in armour (Gk. hoplites dromos). The stadium was 600 feet in length.

the games has escaped the writers of the New Testament and not employed in their figure of speech.”³

Paul was particularly fond of the figure of the Race (Gk. stadion). He uses such phrases as “run in a race” (1 Cor. 9:24), “running well” (Gal. 5:7), and “run in vain” (Phil. 2:16). This is also the figure used by the writer in Hebrews 12:1-3. Of the different games the New Testament mentions four: foot racing, boxing, chariot racing, and wrestling. The footrace is mentioned most frequently. In each of these pictures of athletic life as employed in the New Testament there is a prominent special viewpoint of the spiritual life and effort.

- **The Foot racing looks forward to the heavenly prize, and nothing can be tolerated that may disqualify (1st Corinthians 9.24-26a).** Each believer is on the track; each has a special lane in which to run; and each has a goal to achieve. If we reach the goal the way God has planned, then we receive a reward. If we fail, we lose the reward, but we do not lose our citizenship. (Read 1 Cor. 3:11–15 for the same idea, only using architecture as the symbol). “Do you not know that those **running in a race-course** [*en stadiō*] all run indeed, but one attains the prize. Run thus, that you may win. Everyone who contends [*agōnizomenos*] is self-disciplined in everything, that they indeed might win a perishable victor’s crown [cf. Gal 2:2], but we an imperishable. Therefore **I run** [*trecho*] thus, not as if uncertainly; **I box** [*pukteuō*] thus, not as if shadow-boxing; but I punch [*hypōiazō*] my body and I treat it harshly [like beating a slave, *doulagōgō*], **lest perhaps having proclaimed to others, I myself should become a failure** [*adokimos*]” (1 Cor 9:24–27). The word castaway (1 Cor. 9:27) is a technical word familiar to those who knew the Greek games. It means “disapproved, disqualified.” At the Greek games, there was a herald who announced the rules of the contest, the names of the contestants, and the names and cities of the winners. He would also announce the names of any contestants who were disqualified. He was concerned lest he ignore himself and find himself disqualified. Again, it was not a matter of losing personal salvation. (The disqualified Greek athlete did not lose his citizenship, only his opportunity to win a prize.) The whole emphasis is on rewards, and Paul did not want to lose his reward⁴.
- **Boxing points to our opposition to the enemy in us (1st Corinthians 9.26b-27).** **I box** [*pukteuō*] thus, not as if shadow-boxing; but **I punch** [*hypōiazō*] my body and I treat it harshly [like beating a slave, *doulagōgō*], lest perhaps having proclaimed to others, I myself should become a **failure** [*adokimos*]” (1 Cor 9:24–27).

³ Eric Sauer, The Arena of Faith, p. 61

⁴ Wiersbe.

- **Wrestling refers to our fight with the powers of darkness around us.** Ephesians 6:12 For we do not wrestle (Gk. *pale*) against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.
- **Chariot Racing looks at the intense focus needed to finish the race.** Philippians 3:13-14 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Bible students are not agreed as to the exact sport Paul is describing, whether the footrace or the chariot race. Either one will do, but my own preference is the chariot race. The Greek chariot, used in the Olympic Games and other events, was really only a small platform with a wheel on each side. The driver had very little to hold on to as he raced around the course. He had to lean forward and strain every nerve and muscle to maintain balance and control the horses. The verb "reaching forth" in Philippians 3:13 literally means "stretching as in a race."