

Crowns and Races

The Mark of a Christian

Writing in about AD 125 Aristedes a Christian philosopher looked at the believers of his day and said:

They walk in all humility and kindness, and falsehood is not found among them, and they love one another. They despise not the widow, and grieve not the orphan. He that hath distributeth liberally to him that hath not. If they see a stranger they bring him under their roof, and rejoice over him, as it were their own brother: for they call themselves brethren, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit and in God; but when one of their poor passes away from the world, and any of them see him, then he provides for his burial according to his ability; and if they hear that any of their number is imprisoned or oppressed for the name of their Messiah, all of them provide for his needs, and if it is possible he may be delivered, they deliver him. And if there is a man among them that is poor and needy, and they have not among them an abundance of necessaries, they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with their necessary food.

THE CHIEF DIFFERENT KINDS OF GAMES

The Race (Gk. stadion). Of the different games the New Testament mentions three: racing, boxing, and wrestling. The race is mentioned most frequently.

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 honoured.

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.

In each of the three pictures of athletic life as employed in the New Testament there is prominent a special view-point of the spiritual life and effort.

- ❖ The race looks forward to the heavenly goal, to the “high calling of God in Christ Jesus,” to the realm above (Phil. 3:14).
- ❖ Boxing points to our opposition to the enemy in us. Paul at least so employs it: “so fight (lit. box) I, as not beating the air: but I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage” (I Cor. 9:26,27).
- ❖ Wrestling refers to our fight with the powers of darkness around and beneath us. Thus Paul says: “Our wrestling (Gk. pale) is against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness: (Eph. 6:12).

All of the metaphors Paul uses for the Christian life allude to opposing forces we struggle [agonidzomai] against. Hence his word pictures of warfare, races, struggles, and building. So all of life is a struggle [agony] to please Christ. Listen to Eric Sauer¹ in his helpful book The Arena of Faith “Is not the whole an astonishing, many-sided picture of the race and completion of the spiritual life? The arena of faith, the training, the self-control, the ruthless denial of self, the herald, the entrance to the racecourse, the different kinds of contests, the racing to the goal, the boxing, the wrestling, the rules of the combats, Christ the umpire, the danger of being disqualified, 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 ‘the book of life’, the triumphal entry in the homeland, the banquet, the festival, the gifts, the place of honor-- in fact, scarcely one essential feature of the whole course of the games has escaped the writers of the New Testament and not employed in their figure of speech.”

Thus these three comparisons, in spite of their great similarity, nevertheless picture three different directions of our Christian warfare.

The most important truths illustrated by the race are:

- All can reach the goal. Therefore, according to the will and by the power of God, it is possible for you also.
- All must run and hasten with all available strength. Therefore you also.
- All must concentrate on the goal. No one must be drawn aside by things passing or external.
- All must persevere to the winning-post. No one must yield to fatigue on the way. Therefore you must be purposeful and hold out also.
- All must press forward without pause. No one must permit himself to be detained.
- All must be careful not to stumble in this obstacle-race. For Christ can preserve us.
- All must be determined to win the noblest and highest, and in no case be content with reaching only lesser aims. Therefore you also. Thus will be richly supplied to us the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. (II Pet. 1:11). Thus will be apportioned to us the victor’s prize, the full glory in the day of our manifestation before the judgment seat of Christ, the great heavenly Umpire (II Tim. 4:8; II Cor. 5:10). We conceive that the picture of the race is particularly adapted to represent chief essential truths of Christian sanctification and the fight of faith, and therefore in the New Testament it is more used than any other comparison from the life of sport: (I Cor. 9:24; Phil 3:15; II Tim. 4:7; Acts 20:24; Heb. 12:1,2; perhaps also Gal. 5:7). And as a threefold brilliantly illuminated motto it shines forth from

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Philippians 3, this incomparable self-testimony of the apostle in which he applies the picture of the race to his own spiritual life and service, as he does in no other portion of his epistles so extensively and emphatically:

The calling and strength of the racer -

given entirely by Christ! (Vv. 4-7).

The ideal and the inward object of the racer -

living only for Christ! (8-14).

The blessed hope of the racer -

to be for ever in glory with Christ (20,21; comp. 14).

“For our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (20). Therefore “I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (14).

Whoever after rounding the course seven times crossed the starting line even one step, indeed one foot, ahead of the rest carried off the prize.

In all this, however, keep clearly in mind: He only received the prize who had carried through the full requirements of the contest. No relief was allowed. Not the slightest shortening of the course. Only he who had accepted the whole contest, with all that was involved, could count on the prospect of being crowned as victor.

Therefore dedicate your life unreservedly to the Lord! Shun no difficulty connected with a holy walk and faithful witness. God never compromises with sin. Therefore also you must never do so. Be ready to perfect a full devotion. Practice sobriety and self-control, deny profit and enjoyment, advantage and convenience so far as these can be a hindrance to your course in the race of faith. Christ gave Himself up entirely for you: therefore must your life be dedicated entirely to Him. (John 17:9).

- I. Crowns are for Christians. There are five. Will you get one?
 - A. The CROWN OF LIFE to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ and persevere to the end. The perseverance of saints is the proof of salvation. Thus the Faithful Witness who is loyal unto death gets the Crown of Life in Revelation. 2:10; James 1:12. This crown is especially for those endure suffering loving Jesus all the way. This means having the desire that He be glorified through our response to trials. **LOVING GOD**
 - B. The CROWN OF REJOICING is also called the soul winners crown and it consists of people won for Christ. The unselfish Worker who faithfully wins souls gets the Crown of Honor in I Thessalonians 2:19; Phil 4:1. Note the background of this crown.
 1. Acts 16 Phillipi and beaten
 2. Acts 17 was a 97 mile walk
 3. Three plus weeks of ministry
 4. This was the letter back to them.
 5. The only things we can take with us are people! Are you taking anyone with you? Who, your friends, neighbors, children?
 - C. The the UNFADING CROWN OF SELF-CONTROL is for Steadfast Racer that consistently brings the flesh under the Spirit’s control, resisting all that disqualifies. This one gets Imperishable Crown in I Corinthians. 9:25-27.
 1. This is the crown for holy living as in Romans 6:6-14.

2. This is the crown for focused living as in Hebrews 12:1-2.
3. Some of the principles of this kind of life may be found in Hans Finzels' book Baby Boomers.
 - a) GUARD AGAINST THE APATHY OF AFFLUENCE
Revelation. 3:17
 - (1) self-sufficiency
 - (2) independence
 - (3) spiritual indifference
 - b) VALUE RELATIONSHIPS OVER AND ABOVE FINANCIAL GAIN Phil 4:1; I Th. 2:19-20.
 - c) DREAM ABOUT WINNING THE ULTIMATE PRIZE Matthew 25:21-23 His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. ²³ His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. (KJV) Luke 21:1-4 And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. ² And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. ³ And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: ⁴ For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had. (KJV) Philippians 3:14 ¹⁴ I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (KJV)
 - d) RUB SHOULDERS WITH THE LESS FORTUNATE TO REMIND US THAT THE MORE WE HAVE THE MORE WE NEED TO GIVE I Tim 6:18-19
 - e) FOCUS ON THE SECRET OF GODLY CONTENTMENT I Tim 6:6-8
 - f) Are you holy and focused? On what?
DICIPLINING/LIMITING SELF

D. The CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS goes to those who faithfully watch for Christ each day living with eternity's values as their own. These get the Crown of Righteousness in II Tim. 4:8. Remember Paul is now at the end of his life. He is in the depths of Mamertinum.

1. This crown is for anticipating Christ. Are you?
2. This crown is for following to the finishing line the course the Lord has given you? Are you?

FINISHING THE RACE TO THE END

E. The CROWN OF GLORY is promised to those who live as an Example to the Flock. Faithful undershepherds get the Crown of Glory in I Peter 5:3-4.

1. This is for ministering to the flock of the Lord Jesus Christ in keeping with the elements of verses 2 and 3:
 - a) willingness

- b) sacrificial dedication
 - c) humility
 - d) living as an example for Christ
2. It is for living the life as men and women in I Tim 3:1-13 and I Peter 3:1-5.

SERVING CHRIST'S CHURCH

WHAT DO WE DO WITH THEM ? Look at Revelation. 4:9-11 And when those beasts give glory and honor and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. (KJV)

1. Are you saved? Do you have the crown of life?
2. Are you winning and discipling people? Will you get this crown of rejoicing?
3. Are you Spirit controlled? Will you get the unfading crown?
4. Are you looking for Jesus? Will you get the crown of righteousness?
5. Are you serving Christ's church, His sheep? Will you get the crown of glory?