

World of the Bible Series: Eternal Crowns for Believers Illustrated by Paul, using the Roman World of the New Testament, and the Metaphors of the Godly Walk in the Epistles

Unfading crown vs. the Laurel wreath

Casting crowns

Five Crowns are described.

- The Imperishable Crown (I glorified God by choosing discipline my body);
- The Crown of Exultation (I glorified God by choosing to Disciple & Evangelize);
- The Crown of Righteousness (I glorified God by choosing Living daily for Christ in light of His return);
- The Crown of Life (I glorified God through suffering);
- The Unfading Crown of Glory (I glorified God by choosing to Shepherd His flock).

Crowns are for Christians. There are five. Will you get one?

1. The CROWN OF LIFE **to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ and persevere to the end**. The perseverance of saints is one of the evidences of salvation. Thus the one who is loyal unto death gets the Crown of Life in [Revelation. 2:10](#). 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. GOD CROWNS THOSE WHO LOVE HIM: [James 1:12](#) God crowns those who love Him. God wants your heart! Love only counts to God if it's first place, priority #1 love, more than hobbies, money, professional achievements, scholastic honors, sports victories, possessions. Do you place a higher priority on God or: your job, your house, your recreation, your finances, (i.e. do you spend more time with investments on earth or heaven?)
2. The CROWN OF REJOICING **is also called the soul winners crown and it consists of people won and disciplined for Christ**. The unselfish Worker who faithfully disciples others gets the Crown of Honor in [I Thessalonians 2:19](#); [Phil 4:1](#). The only things we can take with us are people! Are you taking anyone with you? Who, your friends, neighbors, children? ARE WE DISCIPLINING OTHERS? GOD CROWNS THOSE WHO BRING HIM PEOPLE: God crowns those who bring Him what He wants. God wants people, not houses, plaques, collectibles. Remember the Lord allows no U-Hauls behind a hearse. *Because the faithful proclaim the truth, there is promised a 'crown of exultation'*
3. 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](#). This is the crown for holy living as in [Romans 6:6-14](#). This is the crown for focused living as in [Hebrews 12:1-2](#). Some of the principles of this kind of life:

- GUARD AGAINST THE APATHY OF AFFLUENCE [Revelation. 3:17](#): Our world tries to make us seek self-sufficiency and independence; this begets spiritual indifference.
 - VALUE RELATIONSHIPS OVER AND ABOVE FINANCIAL GAIN ([Phil 4:1](#); [I Th. 2:19-20](#));
 - DREAM ABOUT WINNING THE ULTIMATE PRIZE [Matthew 25:21-23](#);
 - 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](#);
 - FOCUS ON THE SECRET OF GODLY CONTENTMENT [I Tim 6:6-8](#) GOD CROWNS THOSE WHO DENY THEIR FLESH: The Steadfast Racer that resists all Disqualifiers gets the Unfading Crown in [I Cor. 9:25-27](#). This is for Mastering our old nature. The Lord's reward for all His faithful followers are varied and wonderful, and all of them are imperishable
4. 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. This crown is for anticipating Christ. Are you? This crown is for following to the finishing line the course the Lord has given you? Are you? Finishing the race to the end. God crowns those who watch for Him: Look for Jesus every day. (I'LL ALWAYS REMEMBER THE PARSONAGE WINDOW IN Rhode Island. When I drove up to the garage Bonnie would have the little ones watching. With wide eyes they would sound the coming home of dad. My joy is such a tiny example of God's longing for our attention!) The Victorious Warrior who faithfully watches for Christ gets the Crown of Righteousness in [II Tim. 4:8](#).
5. The CROWN OF GLORY **is promised to those who live as an Example to the Flock.** Faithful under-shepherds get the Crown of Glory in [I Peter 5:1-5](#). This is for ministering to the flock of the Lord Jesus Christ in keeping with the elements of verses 2 and 3: willingness; sacrificial dedication; humility; living as an example for Christ. It is for living the life as in [I Tim 3:1-13](#) and [I Peter 3:1-7](#). SERVE CHRIST'S CHURCH BECAUSE GOD CROWNS THOSE WHO SERVE HIM: This is for feeding the flock. This is for enduring trials. *Because of the service of the redeemed, the reward given is 'the unfading crown of glory'*

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?

The Basis of Evaluation by the Heavenly Judge is FAITHFULNESS.

- Faithfulness is what God requires as the sum total of our life, deeds and opportunities [I Corinthians. 4:1].
- Faithfulness is obeying God in all we know that is good and right [James 4:17].
- Faithfulness means that God desires sacrifice [Mark 12:42-44].
- Faithfulness means God is watching for selfless love in our attitude [I Corinthians 13].
- Faithfulness means God will someday reveal motives [I Corinthians 4:5].
- Faithfulness means God wants us ready when the Master comes [Matthew 25].
- Faithfulness to God demands that we let Him search and know our hearts [Ps 139].

The nature of the Rewards is that they are IMPERISHABLE!

1. Luke 19:17 Great vs. Nothing
2. First Corinthians 3:12-15 contrasts:
 - a) Permanent vs. Temporary
 - b) Gain vs. Loss
 - c) Fireproof vs. Ashes
3. First Corinthians 9:27 Approved vs. Disqualified
4. First John 4:17 Boldness vs. Shame [cf. I J 2.28]
5. Revelation. 3:17 Rich vs. Poor
6. As Sons and daughters we get Christ's life. As His servants we get His reward and He is coming quickly Revelation 22:12.

B. The crowns are offered to:

1. The Steadfast Racer that resists all Disqualifiers gets the Unfading Crown in I Corinthians. 9:25-27.
2. The unselfish Worker who faithfully wins souls gets the Crown of Honor in I Thessalonians 2:19; Phil 4:1.
3. The Victorious Warrior who faithfully watches for Christ gets the Crown of Righteousness in II Tim. 4:8.
4. The Example to the Flock who faithfully shepherds gets the Crown of Glory in I Peter 5:3-4.
5. The Faithful Witness who is loyal unto death gets the Crown of Life in Revelation. 2:10; James 1:12.

John Piper has said: *"God left us here to spend our lives preparing to go home. This radical pursuit of God's well done has often cost those who have gone before us everything. And if we focus our lives upon Christ's well done it may cost us dearly, even our life: but it will be worth it."*

The world affects all who are not constantly immunized with a sin caused infection

that leads to an insatiable longing, which it tries to satisfy with anything but God. Scenic vacations. Sexual exploits. Ascetic rigors. Managerial excellence. Sports extravaganzas.

*When we as believers are not actively pursuing God we are like Lewis who said: "**We have turned our back to the breathtaking beauty of God and fallen in love with our shadow.** To seek God foremost is a difficult duty indeed. It may cost you your friends. It may cost you your reputation. It may cost you your life. But it will be worth it. Because the steadfast love of the Lord is better than life (Psalm 63:3)!"¹*

For just a moment think of what will matter one minute (or even one second) after any one of us dies. Of course it will be what was permanent in our life. To help us the epistles are written.

In his letters, Paul uses many illustrations from his world, the world of the Bible. We call his world into which the church was born, the Roman World. Paul pulls pictures from the world in which he lived, to illustrate and apply the truths that the inspired Bibles we hold communicate as the foundational truths about the Christian life.

So we have every truth God wants us to know when we hold, read, and understand His Word in the Bible. But, to fully understand how to apply them in our lives, we need to look at the illustrations or pictures that Paul constantly uses from the world, the Roman World, in which he lived.

If we scanned all of Paul's Epistles (in your Bibles they are grouped together from Romans to Philemon) Four are prominent:

1. **Army** or the military ("Put on the whole armor of God"), Several times, for example, Christian living is compared to warfare. Paul counsels us to endure hardship "as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" ([2 Tim. 2:3](#)) and to "put on the full armor of God" ([Eph. 6:11](#)).

Take down tent II Tim 4.8

Ephesians 6:13-17 (NKJV) Therefore take up **the whole armor** of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. 14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the **breastplate** of righteousness, 15 and having **shod your feet** with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 above all, taking the **shield of faith** with which you will be able to quench all the **fiery darts** of the wicked one. 17 And take the **helmet** of salvation, and the **sword** of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

2 Timothy 2:3 (NKJV) You therefore must endure hardship as a **good**

¹ Drawn from John Piper, The Dangerous Duty of Delight: The Glorified God and the Satisfied Soul.

soldier of Jesus Christ

another king acts 17

2. **Architecture** (“You are the temple of God”) [I Cor. 6:19](#).

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NKJV) Or do you not know that your body is the **temple** of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were **bought at a price**; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.

[I Cor. 3:11-15](#) For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; ¹³Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. ¹⁴If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. ¹⁵If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

3. **Agriculture** (“Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap”) in [Galatians 6:7](#).

You gods fields

One sows another waters

Farmer waits 1 tim 2

Galatians 6:7 (NKJV) Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man **sows**, that he will also reap.

4. **Athletics**. In Philippians 3, it is Paul the athlete. 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.”

Ephesians 6:12 For we do not *wrestle* 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.

2 Timothy 2:5 (NKJV) And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

Sunathletes
Sunagonidzomai

Fought good fight/finished race

Peace rule referee

Galatians 5:7 (NKJV) You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?

Philippians 3:14 (NKJV) I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 2:16 (NKJV) holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

1 Corinthians 9:24 (NKJV) Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.

1 Corinthians 9:26 (NKJV) Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.

Hebrews 12:1-3 (NKJV) Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

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 [**agonidzomai**] against. Hence his word pictures of warfare, races, struggles, and building. So all of life is a struggle [agony] to please Christ.

The Race ATHLETICS

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.

Although some type of athletic activity seems to be implied in a few OT passages (Gen 32:24–26; 2 Sam 2:12–17; Ps 3:7; 19:5), most of the references to athletics occur in the NT, particularly in the writings of Paul. Paul demonstrates thorough acquaintance with the sporting events of his day as seen in his references to running (Gal 2:2), boxing (1 Cor 9:26), wrestling (Eph 6:12), gladiatorial contests (1 Cor 4:9; 15:32) and (possibly) chariot races (Phil 3:13–14).

Athletic images conjure up a number of stimulating associations, including:

1. rigorous training or exercise (1 Cor 9:25; 1 Tim 4:7–8),
2. singleness of purpose (1 Cor 9:26),
3. delayed gratification (1 Cor 9:25),
4. streamlining for maximum performance (Heb 12:1),
5. self-control (1 Cor 9:27),
6. perseverance (Heb 12:2) and
7. endurance (1 Tim 4:8).
8. Athletic endeavor also involves intense competition with lofty objectives (1 Cor 9:24) and
9. high stakes (Eph 6:12), and
10. it requires faithful adherence to a prescribed set of rules to avoid disqualification (2 Tim 2:5; 1 Cor 9:27).
11. In spite of all the hard work, the end result is transitory fame. But for the Christian the crown to be won is imperishable (1 Tim 4:8; 1 Cor 9:25).

Paul was particularly fond of the figure of the race. 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. The Race (Gk. stadion). Of the different games the New Testament mentions three: racing, boxing, and wrestling. The race is mentioned most frequently. 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](#)). This is a graphic picture of [Philippians 2:12–13](#): “Work out your own salvation... for it is God which worketh in you.” 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)
- ***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](#)).

Listen to Eric Sauer³ 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. “Looking unto Jesus”

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](#)).

In the Greek Race at the Olympiad, 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:

³ p. 61

Only those who completed all the requirements of the race could win the prize.

Only those who did not quit the race could win the prize

Only those who cut no corners could win the prize.

So only those who dedicate their life unreservedly to the Lord can win the prize.

“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”.

How are we to run Christ's race?

Paul says in [Philippians 3:13](#) “forgetting those things which are behind”. It is an⁴ impossible feat of mental and psychological gymnastics to try to erase the sins and mistakes of the past. That is not what Paul asks, rather he explains that *we break the power of the past by living for the future*. Apart from senility, hypnosis, or a brain malfunction, no mature person can forget what has happened in the past. We may wish that we could erase certain bad memories, but we cannot. “To forget” in the Bible means “no longer to be influenced by or affected by.” When God promises, “And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” ([Heb. 10:17](#)), He is not suggesting that He will conveniently have a bad memory! This is impossible with God. What God is saying is, “I will no longer hold their sins against them. Their sins can no longer affect their standing with Me or influence My attitude toward them.” We cannot change the past, but we can change the *meaning* of the past. There were things in Paul’s past that could have been weights to hold him back ([1 Tim. 1:12–17](#)), but they became inspirations to speed him ahead. The events did not change, but his understanding of them changed. A good example of this principle is Joseph ([Gen. 45:1–15](#)). When he met his brothers the second time and revealed himself to them, he held no grudge against them. To be sure, they had mistreated him, but he saw the past from God’s point of view. As a result he was unable to hold anything against his brothers. Joseph knew that God had a plan for his life—a race for him to run—and in fulfilling that plan and looking ahead, he broke the power of the past. Too many Christians are shackled by regrets of the past. They are trying to run the race by looking backward! No wonder they stumble and fall and get in the way of other Christians! Some Christian runners are being distracted by the *successes* of the past, not the failures; and this is just as bad. “The things which are behind” must be set aside and “the things which are before” must take their place. The Christian does not run the race in order to get to heaven. He is in the race because he has been saved through faith in Jesus Christ. Only Greek citizens were allowed to participate in the games, and they had to obey the rules both in their training and in their performing.

⁴ Adapted from Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Philippians*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

Any contestant found breaking the training rules was automatically disqualified. In order to give up his rights and have the joy of winning lost souls, Paul had to discipline himself. That is the emphasis of this entire chapter: Authority (rights) must be balanced by discipline. If we want to serve the Lord and win His reward and approval, we must pay the price. 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 reward.

Only one runner could win the olive-wreath crown in the Greek games, but *every* believer can win an incorruptible crown when he stands before the Judgment Seat of Christ. This crown is given to those who discipline themselves for the sake of serving Christ and winning lost souls. They keep their bodies under control and keep their eyes on the goal.

In recent years, evangelical Christians have rediscovered the importance of personal discipline and the relationship between a disciplined body and a Spirit-filled life. We must, of course, avoid extremes. On the one hand, religious asceticism is unhealthy and of no value spiritually ([Col. 2:18-23](#)). But on the other hand, there is something to be said for disciplined eating, exercising, and resting, and a Spirit-directed balanced life.

1. We smugly congratulate ourselves that we do not smoke or use alcohol, but what about our overeating and overweight?
2. And many Christians cannot discipline their time so as to have a consistent devotional life or Bible-study program.
3. Paul had one great goal in life: to glorify the Lord by winning the lost and building up the saints. To reach this goal, he was willing to pay any price. *He was willing even to give up his personal rights!* He sacrificed immediate gains for eternal rewards, immediate pleasures for eternal joys⁵.

How do we love Christ's appearing? The Christian runner with the spiritual mind realizes that God must work *in* him if he is going to win the race ([Phil. 2:12-13](#)). "Without Me ye can do nothing" ([John 15:5](#)). God works *in* us that He might work *through* us. As we apply ourselves to the things of the spiritual life, God is able to mature us and strengthen us for the race. "Exercise thyself rather unto godliness!" ([1 Tim. 4:7-8](#)) Some Christians are so busy "dying to self" that they never come back to life again to run the race! And others are so sure they can make it on their own that they never stop to read the Word, pray, or ask for the power of the Lord.

⁵ Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

How do we keep from being disqualified? It is not⁶ enough to run hard and win the race; the runner must also obey the rules. In the Greek games, the judges were very strict about this. Any infringement of the rules disqualified the athlete. He did not lose his citizenship (though he disgraced it), but he did lose his privilege to participate and win a prize. In Philippians 3:15–16, Paul emphasizes the importance of the Christian remembering the “spiritual rules” laid down in the Word. One of the greatest athletes ever to come out of the United States was Jim Thorpe. At the 1912 Olympics at Stockholm, he won the pentathlon and the decathlon, and was undoubtedly the hero of the games. But the next year officials found that Thorpe had played semiprofessional baseball and therefore had forfeited his amateur standing. This meant that he had to return his gold medals and his trophy, and that his Olympic achievements were erased from the records. It was a high price to pay for breaking the rules. (Thorpe’s medals were reinstated in 1985 by the Olympic Committee.) This is what Paul has in mind in 1 Corinthians 9:24–27. “Any man who enters an athletic contest practices rigid self-control in training” (Phil. 3:14, wms).

Philippians 3:15-16

15 Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. 16 Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

- If the athlete breaks training, he is disqualified;
- If he breaks the rules of the game, he is disqualified. “No contestant in the games is crowned, unless he competes according to the rules” (2 Tim. 2:5, wms). The issue is not what *he* thinks or what the *spectators* think but what the judges say.
- One day each Christian will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10–12). The Greek word for “judgment seat” is **BEMA**, the very same word used to describe the place where the Olympic judges gave out the prizes! If we have disciplined ourselves to obey the rules, we shall receive a prize.
- Bible history is filled with people who began the race with great success but failed at the end because they disregarded God’s rules. They did not lose their salvation, but they did lose their rewards (1 Cor. 3:15). It happened to Lot (Gen. 19), Samson (Jud. 16), Solomon (I Kings 11), and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). And it can happen to us! It is an exciting experience to run the race daily, “looking unto Jesus” (Heb. 12:1–2). It will be even more exciting when we experience that “upward calling” and Jesus returns to take us to heaven! Then we will stand before the *bema* to receive our rewards! It was this future prospect that motivated Paul, and it can also motivate us.

In the ancient Isthmian games of Greece⁷, a pedestal stood at the finish line, and on it hung a wreath—the winner’s prize. No one runs a race without some expectation of reward. The reward may be nothing more than a ribbon or a trophy or a wreath of leaves. It may be a prize worth a large amount of money. Sometimes the reward is fame and recognition. Sometimes it is a healthy body. Occasionally the race is run for the sheer exhilaration. The Isthmian races and the race spoken of in Hebrews 12,

⁶ Drawn from Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

⁷ Quoted from Hebrews 12, MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983.

however, were not run for exhilaration. This type of race is the agony race, the marathon, the race that seems never to end. It is not a race you run simply for the pleasure of running. If you do not have something important to look forward to at the end of this race, you will likely not start it and will certainly not finish it.

The competition of the Christian life, of course, is different from that of an athletic race in two important ways.

First, we are not to compete against other Christians, trying to outdo each other in righteousness, recognition, or accomplishments. Ours is not a race of works but a race of faith. Yet we do not compete with each other even in faith. We compete *by* faith, but not with each other. Our competition is against Satan, his world system, and our own sinfulness, often referred to in the New Testament as the flesh.

Second, our strength is not in ourselves, but in the Holy Spirit; otherwise we could never endure. We are not called on to endure in ourselves, but in Him⁸.

If we are believers⁹, we are in the race, and we are surrounded by a great cloud of lives whose examples call for our best—the *patriarchs* (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), the *prophets* (Moses, Elijah, Samuel, Daniel, Jeremiah), the *apostles* (Peter, John, Paul), the *martyrs* (Stephen, Polycarp, Cranmer, Elliott, Saint), the *preachers* (Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Spurgeon), the *missionaries* (Carey, Taylor, Carmichael), our *departed family members*, and on and on. Their faces invite us to finish well. So the imperatives are before us:

- We must *divest* ourselves of all hindrances and sins. Figuratively speaking, if our foot hinders us, we must chop it off; if our eye causes us to sin, we must gouge it out (cf. [Matthew 5:29](#), 30). We will not finish the race apart from radical divestment.
- We must *run* with patient perseverance the race that is marked out individually for each of us. We must put one foot in front of the other, refusing to quit—unhasting, unresting, constant.
- We must *focus* on Jesus as “the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.” Jesus must cover the entire sky. He must be the center and horizons of our sight. Such vision will insure for us faith’s beginning and end.
- We must *consider* him and how he lived amidst contradiction and follow his example.

II. So, its going to be

A. Public

1. phanerothenai which means more than just to appear, it means to make manifest. Before the God of the universe and all of creation, we will be made known before all.
2. bema is the judgment seat of the rulers of old. It is raised for all to see. That is the place all will appear one by one.

⁸ MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983.

⁹ Drawn from Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Hebrews Vol 1&2—An Anchor for the Soul*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books) 1998, c1993.

B. Personal

1. All [plural] must appear in order that each one individually which is the literal meaning of 'may receive'.
2. phaulon translated bad does not speak of evil but 'good for nothingness'¹⁰ The believer is either going to have to answer for the good things done faithfully for the Master, or for the rest which was good for nothingness. This is 'light, unstable, blown about by every wind'. Oh, to stand before all in that day and to answer to Him.

How about it? Our appointment at the seat of our judge is coming. What will you walk away with?

1. The Steadfast Racer that resists all Disqualifiers gets the Unfading Crown in I Corinthians. 9:25-27. As one who keeps the flesh down and lives under the control of the Spirit.
2. The unselfish Worker who faithfully wins souls gets the Crown of Honor in I Thessalonians 2:19; Phil 4:1. As he faithfully goes into his world, wisely wins souls and disciples them for Christ.
3. The Victorious Warrior who faithfully watches for Christ gets the Crown of Righteousness in II Tim. 4:8. One who looks and lives like they expect Jesus at any time.
4. The Example to the Flock who faithfully shepherds gets the Crown of Glory in I Peter 5:3-4. One who leads
5. The Faithful Witness who is loyal unto death gets the Crown of Life in Revelation. 2:10; James 1:12. Are we willing to suffer for Christ to the death whether life long or momentarily?

Conclusion

1. Works are important because the Lord said that our works reveal what is at the root of our life.
2. Quality is imperative because God will examine not only what we have done but why. The Spirit of God is the incredible secret to a life that counts, because apart from Him we can do nothing

¹⁰ Trench, 296-97.