

THE CHRISTIAN ATHLETE

Hebrews 12:1

Introduction: Sports, athlete events, games, soldiers, and competition of all sorts were the norm for the times of Jesus and the early Church and the writers of the New Testament used terminology familiar to these such things to help get across the truths of the Gospel. Paul writes of the Christian putting on a "suit of armor," thus assigning a piece of the armor a soldier wore to a Christian trait and so on.

In the New Testament racing, boxing and wrestling, are mentioned often as the writers tried to help us readers understand the depths and truths of the Gospel message. The "race" mentioned is meant to help the Christian realize life as a continuous effort to reach a worthy goal as a runner would do so to win a prize. (*Philippians 3:14*). "Boxing" was used by a writer to help us understand how we combat the evil that is within us. (*1 Corinthians 9:26-27*). "Wrestling" is used to help us see the struggle that we must go through to combat the powers of darkness around us. (*Ephesians 6:12*).

Let's take a look at the race one of the writers described that the Christian is in.

I. THERE IS A RACE BEFORE THE CHRISTIAN

1. Contrary to one's first thought, being born again, the new birth is the starting line, rather than the finishing line of the race in the Christian's life.
 - Becoming a Christian is not all there is to being what God has in mind.
 - From salvation to physical death, the Christian is in a "contest."
2. The "race set before us" (Christians) is our divinely given task. It is the Christian's duty to "run."
 - God has a life plan for every Christian/believer.
 - Along each life there are duties, responsibilities, trials, hazards, like some obstacle course.
3. The Christian cannot separate his/her personal life of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ from being a "runner" in this race. God has ordained that each believer is to be a "runner."
 - One cannot be obedient without "running."
 - God has NO observers! Only participants, runners.

II. CONSIDER THE CHALLENGE OF THE RACE

1. First of all every Christian has already been declared a winner. Everyone who is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is an "overcomer."
2. Every Christian must "run" with all "available" strength.
 - Every believer has different capabilities.
 - Every believer has a different path/course/race to run.
 - Every believer must use what God has given him/her.
3. Every Christian must concentrate on the goal and it is easy to become sidetracked.
 - Satan will do all he can to get the Christian to take his/her eyes off the finish line. He will distract, slow down, and even stop the Christian every chance he gets.

- The Christian's own, personal, determination will be tested to the limit.
4. Every Christian must persevere, struggle, strive, to reach the finish line. (*2 Timothy 4:8*).
 - As in any marathon, it is a long, long way and takes a long time to run.
 - The Christian must learn how to pace him/herself by using patience, keep up his/her determination, keeping one's eyes on the finish line.
 - The Christian must not give up, yielding to fatigue along the way, falling beside the way.
 5. The Christian must press forward, keep the pace up without ever pausing for a "second breath."
 - The Christian must keep moving forward at all costs to his/her own comfort and ease.
 - The Christian must run, walk, stagger, crawl, do anything to keep moving forward.
 6. The Christian must also be careful not to stumble.
 - He/she must not watch others but keep his/her eyes upon the Lord Jesus.
 - He/she must not listen to others, but only to the voice of the Lord Jesus.
 7. The Christian must be determined to cross the finish line as best he/she can and not be satisfied with just barely getting across the line....not to be content to do less than God asks.

III. CHRISTIAN, CONSIDER THE PRIZE

1. One day every Christian shall hear, "*...welcome home thou good and faithful servant/soldier.*"
IF he/she has indeed been faithful in running the course God set his/her life upon.
2. Knowing that you have helped others along the way, you will be rewarded extra.

CONCLUSION:

1. No doubt, no question about it, the race is HARD!
2. Without the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, and other Christians encouraging us, it would be impossible.
3. Christian, run YOUR OWN race, follow the course God has for you, it will be different from different from anybody else's but it will be what God wants for you and He will be with you every minute of it as you keep your eyes upon Him.
4. Christian, you are God's athlete, His soldier. Follow His orders and you will win.