

# Attain the Prize

1 Corinthians 9:24

## Introduction

1. In 1 Corinthians 9:24 Paul exhorts us to run in such a way that we may attain the prize which awaits us in heaven.
2. Let us consider his words and strive to apply them to the way we live our lives before God.

## Discussion

### I. Run

- A. The word Paul used to describe this action shows us the kind of attitude we must have.
  1. We are not to sit around or doddle. Rather, RUN!
    - a. He compares Christian life to a race.
    - b. One cannot sit around or simply not pay attention while running a race.
    - c. Neither can Christians hope to attain the prize of eternal life if they are not being diligent in their spiritual lives.
  2. If another person were to evaluate your spiritual life, would they say that you are running?
  3. If you were in the place of the servant in the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30), what would your Master say to you? Are you being diligent? Are you being zealous for good works? Are you running with zeal toward the prize that awaits you?
- B. Many people are content to lie around or to doddle when it comes to spiritual things.
  1. In the parable of the talents, the servant who did not work with the talents which his master gave him was called a "*wicked and lazy servant*" (Matt. 25:26).
  2. Many people who have obeyed the gospel and have received great talents, among which are salvation and the word of God. But many are not using those talents to serve God as they ought to.
    - a. Some may be uncertain as to what they should be doing as Christians.
    - b. Perhaps we are having a hard time finding the motivation to do things such as read our Bibles, help our brethren, or get together for Bible studies.
  3. If we are beings sluggish in our spiritual service to God, no matter the reason, we must consider the lesson in the parable of the talents and apply the exhortation that Paul gave in 1 Cor. 9:24.
- C. Another truth concerning the race that we are running is that we will face obstacles.
  1. Anyone who has run cross-country will know the feeling when they come across a large mud puddle on a rainy day, or a steep hill that takes all the wind out of them.

2. Throughout their lives Christians encounter spiritual obstacles in this same manner.
  - a. We may experience the hardship that comes with standing for the truth in a world of error.
  - b. We may have to struggle with the loss of our loved ones.
  - c. We may become discouraged as we try to work and grow in God's kingdom while facing continual set backs and losses.
3. But throughout all of our struggles we must never forget Paul's exhortation to run, for all of these things are merely part of our race.
4. We are spiritual athletes as well as servants. We have been given tools by God to help us finish our race.
  - a. He shows us the path that we must run, acknowledging that it is narrow and difficult.
  - b. But He also shows how to run, illustrating the proper technique through His only begotten Son (1 John 2:6).
  - c. He shows us how to overcome all of life's obstacles, as it is written in 2 Peter 1:3, "*as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.*"
5. But if we are going to win our race and attain our prize we must put God's tools to use and run with all of our might!

D. In order to run, the athlete must prepare himself.

1. In Heb. 12:1 Christians are once again compared to athletes, as it says, "*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. Notice the phrase "*lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us.*"
3. This is in reference to the athlete who removes all articles of clumsy and bulky clothing that may hinder him as he runs.
  - a. We would never see an Olympian or professional marathon runner trying to run in their galoshes, neither would we see them trying to swim in a rain jacket or cotton sweat pants.
  - b. Such clothing would severely hinder the athlete, bogging him down and holding him back. It would "easily ensnare" him so that he cannot compete in the race.
4. As Christians we must search for those things that are holding us back in our spiritual lives and remove them so that we can be free to run the race set before us.
  - a. First and foremost, we must remove the sin which ensnares us. This is a constant process of self-evaluation, repentance, forgiveness, and drive to overcome.
  - b. It includes the sins of the heart as well as the body.
5. Along with our sins, there may be worldly or secular influences in our lives that are holding us back.

- a. For the rich young ruler in Matt. 19:16-22, his riches were keeping him from entering the kingdom. He was obedient in everything else, but he loved his riches more than God. Therefore Jesus commanded him to sell all he had and give it to the poor.
- b. We must take an honest look at our own lives to find those things that are bogging us down.
- 6. We will find that there are some things we must get rid of and there are other things that we simply need to work around.
  - a. For example, we cannot simply quit our jobs because they take time away from spiritual things. We are commanded to serve the Lord, but we are also commanded to provide for our own (2 Thess. 3:10; 1 Tim. 5:8).
  - b. Rather than separating our secular lives from our spiritual lives, we must allow our spiritual life to govern our secular lives.
    - i. Doing our work “*heartily, as to the Lord*” (Col. 3:23).
    - ii. Upholding God’s righteousness in the face of peer pressure (Dan. 1:8).
    - iii. Using our interaction with people at work as an opportunity to teach the gospel.
  - c. However, if we encounter obstacles in our lives which we cannot work around and which severely hinder our race, we must put our trust in God and cast off those things.
    - i. This was exactly what Paul did when He became a Christian (Phil. 3:8).
    - ii. This was one of the conditions Jesus gave upon our following Him (Matthew 16:24-27).
    - iii. What is holding you back? Are you striving to cast it off?
- E. Some people have asked, “What am I supposed to do? How am I supposed to run?” But we can take joy in the fact that God has not left us empty handed, for He also shows us how to run the race.

## II. In Such A Way

- A. This term implies that there is a method, a proper way to run the race.
  - 1. Christianity is not a random thing that a person can choose to apply in whatever way seems best to him.
    - a. Many today take a shopper’s approach to the church.
    - b. They “shop around” to find the church that best suits their desires.
    - c. But this is not the pattern God has provided.
  - 2. In order to attain the prize, a runner must not only run with all of his might, he must also follow the predetermined course for the race.
  - 3. God has laid out the course for His people. Jesus tells us in Matt. 7:13-14, “*...narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.*”
- B. This narrow way applies every aspect of our lives.
  - 1. It applies to our worship to God.
    - a. Some people have said that they can talk to God just fine and home and that they do not need to assemble with the church.

- b. But in the scriptures, every aspect of Christians worship is described as being done by the church while assembled together. Therefore, if we are to worship God in spirit and in truth we must assemble with the saints (John 4:23-24).
  - 2. It applies to our speech (Col. 4:6; Heb. 13:15).
  - 3. It applies to the thoughts of our hearts (James 4:8; Matt. 15:8).
  - 4. It applies to the works that we do (Tit. 2:14; 1 Thess. 2:13).
  - 5. It is a race that requires endurance. It involves continual service.
- C. In order to win our prize we must stay on course.
- 1. Denominations are not on course, for they add to God's word.
  - 2. Christians who fail to assemble with the saints are not on course, for they take away from God's word.
  - 3. In order to stay on course we must be watchful.
    - a. Our obstacles include things such as error, laziness, and sin.
    - b. They also include things that draw our attention away from God—entertainment, family, school.
  - 4. No matter what we are doing, in order to stay on course we must always acknowledge God (Prov. 3:6). This means to obey His instruction, trust in Him, and glorify Him in all we do.

### III. Attain the Prize

- A. Through all of our efforts and toils, we must always look to the prize.
  - 1. The only way an athlete will endure his race if he remembers why he is running.
  - 2. Being a Christian is difficult. Jesus readily admitted this. "*Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it*" (Matthew 7:14).
- B. For this reason, in order to run our race we must continually remind ourselves of the prize that awaits us. By this we will keep it fresh in our minds.
- C. As you run your race, remember that no matter how hard life gets, your reward far out weighs the sacrifice (Romans 8:18).

### Conclusion

- 1. If you desire the crown of life, know that it can only be received through faith and obedience to Christ.
- 2. Understand that Jesus expects His people to be different from those in the world.
- 3. We are running a different race, walking a different path, and seeking a different prize.
- 4. What are you striving for?

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