

Run for the Prize

Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. **—1 Corinthians 9:25**

In the Olympics an athlete was subject to disqualification if he did not go through ten months of strict training. It is interesting that in those ten months the athlete had to do away with lawful pleasures. The Greek word that is used here is agnoidzo; it means “to agonize.” It means self-control in all things, and so the implication is that if the athlete has to have self-control for ten months prior to the games, so this Christian race is to be run throughout a lifetime of self-control. This refers, of course, not merely to the body, but to the whole man—body, mind, spirit.

The prize won at the Olympics was a wreath, sometimes made of pine, and strangely enough, sometimes made of celery! That’s right! Can you imagine wearing a wreath of pieces of celery? Perhaps if it is fresh and you give me some salt with it I could enjoy it.

The wreath was already beginning to wither when they put it on the winner’s head. So when Paul says they do it to get a crown that will not last, that sounds like an understatement. But what it looked like was not the point. The winner had no thought of the composition of the crown. As with modern athletes, victory meant fame; it was for prestige and sometimes fortune, so that the crown was simply a symbol of victory.

Paul says that crown was nothing in the light of the believer’s prize. Who knows what it will look like? Who knows whether it is a symbolic gold crown or if it is literal? Who knows? But just to hear the words of Jesus, “Well done!” will give to that person a self-consciousness that will last

forever.

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