

1 Corinthians 9:24 - 27 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*.²⁵ And everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for* an imperishable crown.²⁶ Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as *one who* beats the air.²⁷ But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

There are no losers in Heaven

I read that in some places in the country, around 50% of people watched the superbowl. Things haven't changed. People like athletic competitions. That is true now and it was true 2,000 years ago. They had a big stadium in Corinth in which they had contests and every three years they had the Isthmian games. It was huge. It was like the superbowl. The stadium was filled with cheering people. Merchants sold wine instead of beer, but same difference. They may have even done the wave while they routed on their favorite athletes. The only really significant change is the sports they competed in and watched. We might watch football or bull riding, they watched foot races and javelin throwing. Thus they would have been very familiar with the example Paul was using. They would have been familiar with how the best runners in the world came to Corinth every three years and spent ten months

training for the Isthmian Games. They would have been familiar with how these athletes disciplined mind and body, carefully controlling their sleep and food and exercise all for one purpose that they might wear the laurel crown.

Paul points to those athletes and says run like them. But what does he mean by that? That we should all go on diets and run three times a day? Hardly, he was using those races as comparison to spiritual things, but what is His point? That only one person will win the race of life and get into heaven? No, that is not it. Paul's point of comparison isn't that there is only one prize but we are to run like the athletes who compete for only one prize. How do they run? With determination.

Paul switches from the second person to the first to tell them and us what he was going to do to win that prize. He was going to run thus - not with uncertainty. But with certainty. Uncertainty kills. Uncertainty slows you down and saps the strength from you. I know this first hand. Running a marathon is just as much mental as physical. Around mile 15, I begin wondering why in the world I am doing this. You begin thinking

why don't I just stop and go eat some pancakes? Then you start thinking about how you have 11 more miles to go. And you start wondering if you can make it. If you let those thoughts, that uncertainty control you, you will become more and more convinced that you can't make it and then what will you do? You will give up. If you are going to finish a marathon you have to have some confidence or if you are a football team down by 10 points at half time you have to have some confidence that you can come back, or you won't.

So Paul is telling you in your race to heaven, run like winners and how do winners run? With confidence. Would the little engine that could, get up the hill if the whole way he told himself "I can't I can't". No he would not. So should we our whole life keep saying "I can get to heaven, I can get to heaven"? We are to run with certainty but not with certainty in ourselves. WE are to run with certainty in Christ. **2 Timothy 4:8** *Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*

Why do we receive a crown of righteousness having successfully run the gauntlet of this world and kept the faith? Because we were so righteous? Is that why we receive a crown of righteousness? No. If we had run the course of this life being the son or daughter we should have been, having been the husband or wife we should have been, having been the father or mother we should have been, having been the neighbor and brother and sister we should have been, having done no harm, no evil but only good then we could claim that crown of righteousness on our own merit. Then we would be deserving of heaven. But we have not and can not. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. You and I have done great harm as a son or daughter, as a father or mother, as a husband or wife as a brother or sister as a neighbor. There are people out there who have despised the name of the Lord because of our sin, our failures, our evil. We deserve no crown. We deserve chains. We deserve hell. So how can we run with certainty? Because that Crown of Righteousness was laid up for you not by you, but by Christ. It is His righteousness that He gives you as a gift of grace through faith as the book of Romans continues. "All

have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God but are justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Through the cross, the sin of man, your sin was forgiven and the righteousness of Jesus was given, given to you. There is a crown of righteousness waiting for you in heaven. And that crown is also a crown of life as James and Revelations calls it and a crown of glory as Peter calls it. We are confident it is there for us. Because of the cross, we go through our life confident that it is there for us, waiting for us. Yes it is certainty that gets us through the gauntlet of this life, through all the temptations and tricks of Satan, it certainty that gets up the hill of this sinful world but it is certainty in Christ who loved you and gave Himself unto hell to get you into heaven, who gave Himself into the hands of death and humiliation to give you the crown of life, glory and righteousness. Run with confidence. Live in confidence that Heaven is yours in Christ.

Does this mean that we can be careless and do what ever we want? Never ! Our confidence that there is laid up for us a crown of righteousness makes us all the more eager to not be disqualified from the race because of unbelief. We are confident that there is a

crown of righteousness and glory and life laid up for us but it is only ours if we finish the race. Note what Paul said **2 Timothy 4:7-8** *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.* ⁸ *Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*

Understand the nature of the race that you are in. The victory isn't to the quickest, it isn't to just one person, that victory is to all those who finish. Despite all your sins and failings, victory is before you. Heaven is open in Christ. Run to win. Run with confidence in Jesus your savior. Run to finish the race to keep the faith. There are no losers in heaven. Everyone who finishes life in faith wins the prize because it is Christ who laid up for each of you a crown of righteousness.

There are no losers in heaven. Take a moment and consider what that means. What does that mean for your life, for your race? Well first, it means we run with confidence knowing that Jesus has laid up for us a crown of righteousness. What a comfort to know

that our sins have not disqualified and condemned us. What a comfort to know our best and most glorious days are ahead. Secondly knowing that there are no losers in heaven affects how you train. Your goal is not be the quickest. Your goal is to get there and like Paul stand before thanking God that you have completed the race, that you have kept the faith. Therefore, like the athletes training for the games in Corinth, you practice great temperance and self control and discipline but not in regard to your body but to your faith. Your training, your discipline is to throw away all things that might cause you to not finish the race, all things that might destroy your faith and your training and discipline is to indulge in all things that increase your faith. **Hebrews 12:1** *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.* I am not going to tell you what things are a burden and disease to your faith, those things are usually pretty obvious if you ask yourself, but I will ask you -the crown of righteousness, is that something you want? The laurel crown that those runners in Corinth received for being the fastest was perishable and only one person could win it. The leaves soon

faded and rotted and even the glory dissolved. The crown that you run for is imperishable, it is eternal life and glory and righteousness in Jesus and all can win it. Jesus laid it up for you. He wore a crown of thorns so you could wear a crown of glory. Do you want that crown? Then act like it. Throw away from your life and person the things, the situations, that might get you disqualified by destroying your faith and indulge joyously and richly in the things that increase your faith in Jesus, that increase your confidence that there is laid up for you a sinner who deserves hell, a place, a crown in heaven. I will tell you what things will do that - prayer, fellowship, the sacraments, and most of all God's Word at home alone or with your family or at church with your other family. Faith comes from hearing the Word of God. Indulge to your heart's content. It won't make you fat. It will make you strong and confident in the Lord. *those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary.* They shall win a crown . Amen.

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