

Know Ye Not?

“Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. . . .

Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”

*—I Corinthians
9:24-27*

THE OUTSTANDING REMARKS of the apostle are, ‘So run,’ and so ‘obtain.’ These are prefaced with the telling phrase so often used by Paul, ‘Know ye not?’ Here are a few instances, and all so impressive:

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?”—Rom. 6:3

“Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey?”—Rom. 6:16

“Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?”—I Cor. 5:6

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?”—I Cor. 6:9

“Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus

Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”—II Cor. 13:5

The Apostle James adds, “Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?”—James 4:4

“Do you really not know that they which run in a race run all; so,” as Ferrar Fenton says, “The runners on the track all run, but one carries off the prize.” (I Cor. 9:24, *Fenton’s Translation*) Therefore, as the apostle emphasizes, so run that you may win. Run with diligence, perseverance, constancy, and care that you will gain the reward.

To do this implies concentration of purpose. Not one thing is ever achieved without a conviction of its being right, and a growing enthusiasm to accomplish it. The apostle assures us of this great principle when he says, “This one thing I do” (Phil. 3:13), and again, “So fight I, not as one that beateth the air.”—I Cor. 9:26

When Paul was journeying from Ephesus to Jerusalem, he was assured by the Holy Spirit that bonds and afflictions awaited him, and he said, “None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”—Acts 20:24

Let us seek to follow the apostle as he followed Christ, and so run in the race of life and immortality, not uncertainly, thoughtlessly, but with a clear definite objective in view, as did Paul. “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.”—Phil. 3:7

OLYMPIC GAMES

In the Olympic games, to which Paul so often refers, there were prescribed regulations for each competitor to observe and obey in order to become eligible to race or to play in the games. These were: (1) Freemen only were eligible, (2) Ten months' training under a professional trainer or tutor, (3) Particular attention to one's diet, (4) Special discipline to one's habits, (5) Repeated and continual exercise and practice.

An experienced trainer or tutor was necessary for the competitor to become conversant with every need and detail. The Scriptures suggest that our trainer and tutor is Christ Jesus our Lord. In his experiences he became our forerunner and captain, and as we concentrate on the hope set before us, looking to that which is beyond the veil—"the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10)—we shall be inspired by the instructions imparted to us through his Word. Jesus said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."—John 6:63

We can see Jesus crowned with glory and honor. "It became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." (Heb. 2:10) "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus." (chap. 3:1) Again, "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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." (chap. 12:2) We are to be copies at heart of God's dear Son, and be "conformed" to his image.—Rom. 8:29

FREEMEN

To be a freeman implies that all encumbrances and hindrances would need to be disposed of. Engagement in other contracts taking one's interest and time would prevent one from holding a position as a competitor for the prize. As children of Adam, and therefore as children of disobedience, and as men of the world fulfilling the desires of the flesh, we could not hope to enter upon the race for life in Christ, and for immortality and the Divine nature, as promised.—I Pet. 1:4; II Pet. 1:4

We must first be delivered from Adam's condemnation and freed from the burden of sin in our hearts. Repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, demonstrated by a full consecration, are the steps necessary to attain this freedom. Being made free through Christ, we are eligible to enter the race for "the prize of the high calling of God" (Phil. 3:14); and then we should remember that "no man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life."—II Tim. 2:4

This being our happy heart experience, we can say with the apostle, and with all who accept this great honor, "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." (I John 3:21) It is here that we learn the first principles and go on to perfection, not forgetting them, but in building up our increase of faith upon those principles of elementary faith and full appreciation of God's Word.

The giving up of oneself in consecration to do the LORD's commands is a glorious experience in human life, and the outworking of Romans 12:2, "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may

prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” This is one of the greatest privileges, and one of the highest honors, ever conferred upon angels or men. It is the noblest deed that man can possibly perform. Those who have thus devoted themselves to God can enjoy the thrill of the poet’s expression:

“Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine,
Shall have my soul, my life, my all.”

It is right here in our experience of Christian life that the race set before us actually starts.

TRAINING

The ten months’ training of the Olympic athlete would compare largely with our earlier experiences in the Christian way, prior to our definite consecration. Whereas consecration—coming to a decision to take up our cross, to deny ourselves, and to follow Jesus Christ—marks the time of actually entering the race.

Just as a professional tutor in the Olympic race would furnish all competitors with a knowledge of the dangers and ensnarements during the actual race, so our tutor in the Christian race encourages and exhorts us to perseverance and endurance. We also become aware of every pitfall before and during the running of the race.

PITFALLS IN THE RACE

Sometimes there may be disappointments at the position given to start off in the race. “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have.” (Heb. 13:5)

“Godliness with contentment is great gain.” (I Tim. 6:6) Do not complain or compare yourself to others with greater advantages and less disability. Through “much tribulation” we enter the kingdom of God.—Acts 14:22

Some may run because their friends do, rather than for personal eagerness to gain the prize. But we should individually run for the prize. Paul wrote, “Being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.”—Phil. 3:10,11

There may be real faintness, fatigue, resulting from self-effort. Always remember that “it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” (Phil. 2:13) “He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.” (Isa. 40:29) Let us, then, “lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.”—Heb. 12:1,2

There is a tendency with some to be careless. “Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”—I Pet. 1:13

Others are self-reliant, proud of strength and form. These easily miss the way. They keep running, but never arrive. “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”—James 4:6

Some runners are too self-centered and vain. They give too much attention to externals—how they shine, whether or not spectators are taking note of all their salient points. “If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do

mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” (Rom. 8:13) “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life.” (John 6:27) Jesus assured his disciples, “The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.” (Luke 12:23) “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”—Gal. 5:1

All these are as pitfalls in the way of those taking their place as runners in the race for the crown of life, and will be encountered as the race proceeds. As the tutors of the Olympic games and races warn their runners, or prospective winners, so our heavenly tutor and High Priest warns and admonishes us against these things. In the heavenly race all these possibilities have to be accounted for, and even greater temptations than these confront us.

The apostle brings to our attention the devices of our great Adversary. “We wrestle not against flesh and blood [merely], but against principalities, against powers, . . . spiritual wickedness in high places,” and against “the rulers of the darkness of this world.” For this reason, since these are more powerful than ourselves, we are exhorted to take every precaution in fortifying our hearts and minds with the whole armor of Truth provided for our security in Christ. (Eph. 6:11,12) “Beware,” says the apostle, “lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”—Col. 2:8

The response to the Adversary is by the human heart. The human heart, as God’s Word says, is

deceitful and “desperately wicked.” (Jer. 17:9) The Adversary’s method of operation is by strategy rather than by open violence. Therefore, we find it necessary to be quite convinced and fully enthused with the faith that wins.

If this is so, we shall find ourselves adhering more strongly to the principles of Truth and love, even to one’s own hurt. “Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.” (I Cor. 9:25) We may be called upon during this race to sacrifice our human attainments and prospects for the will of God, and we readily acquiesce. In these tests and experiences we become more restful, and equipped for even greater trials of our faith. We are more peaceful amidst confusion, and more resigned to every experience, whether it be sweet or bitter. We learn to count it a “joy” when we “fall into divers temptations.” (James 1:2) We well know that “God is able to make all grace abound” toward us, that we, always having “all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.”—II Cor. 9:8

God’s commands are his enablings. If he bids us go forward, it is lack of faith in him rather than distrust in ourselves if we hesitate, falter, and draw back. This inspires one to go on and on with humble spirit, and with a stout heart, full of confidence and assurance to so run that he may obtain.

All who hold fast to the conviction of faith, strong and unwavering, embrace confidently the promises of God and become victors before God. Think of Moses who, by faith, when he came to years “refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a

season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.” (Heb. 11:24-26) Abraham went out from his own country, not knowing whither he went, and was among those who “died in faith, not having received the promises, but . . . were persuaded of them,” and looked for a city prepared of God.—Heb. 11:8-16

As those who preceded us reached their goal by faith and endurance, so must we reach our goal. These things are recorded for our benefit, to supply us with food for thought and meditation, that we might take comfort in the Scriptures. (Rom. 15:4) Let us take a lesson from these noble worthies of the past and note their severe discipline, the intense-ness of their struggles, and their reward in comparison with our own privilege of being called to a throne. (I Cor. 1: 26) ‘Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, . . . and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.’

Every man that strives is temperate—agonizes, indulges self in no way whatever, but bruises the body, keeps it in subjection. (I Cor. 9:27) He fulfills not only some, but all conditions relating to the race. He does it for a corruptible crown, “but we an incorruptible.” (I Cor. 9:25) If men show such extraordinary devotion to self-sacrifice for a perishable crown, what should be the devotion and sacrifice of those for whom an imperishable crown is certain! (II Tim. 4:8) What an encouragement to mount up in the spirit of Christ with “wings as eagles;” to “run, and not be weary;” to “walk, and not faint.”—Isa. 40:31

In the Olympic races and games there is continual practice thirty days prior to the race. So we should give greater diligence. No day should be allowed to pass without meditation, prayer, and earnestness in righteousness, unity and love, and in fellowship and communion with God.

DEVOTION AND SERVICE

The race involves contemplation and activity, devotion and service. The exhortation is not only to so run. The apostle also says, 'so fight I.' The illustration changes from running to boxing. So contend I, Paul wrote. He had an adversary to strike, and did not do so wildly or impotently, thus merely beating the air. There is a definite aim, a decided purpose. We should not wear out our strength with vain flourishes, but with a telling aim. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."—James 4:7

Many people of God flounder, and often repress merely the symptom of trouble instead of attacking the real disease. It is better to examine the particular hindrances, bring them into subjection and make them slaves, conquered and led captive. 'Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey?'

If there is anything we delight to do, we shall be found at every opportunity doing that thing. Jesus said, "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." (John 14:23) The great objective of this race is that we might dwell with God and with Jesus Christ our Lord. Let us make it our delight.

Soon the clock of the ages will have struck, and the last members of that glorious priesthood will have completed their course. Then shall be heard once more, 'It is finished.' Then shall we enter into joys abundant forevermore, and we shall be with the Lord to express perfect praise to him and our Father. This will be our happy ending!

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