

1 Corinthians 9:24-10:5 (NIV)

24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 25 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. 26 Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. 27 No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. 1 For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. 2 They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. 3 They all ate the same spiritual food 4 and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.

This portion of God's Word is certainly timely for us this week. We are in the midst of the Winter Olympics. Men and women from countries all around the world train for 4 years to compete in these games. Every single one of those athletes is training to win. While there are medals for second and third places, only one athlete truly attains what everyone is training for, the prized gold medal. These athletes train their bodies with a very distinct purpose in mind. They do not simply go through the motions. They sculpt and tone their bodies so that it will perform at its peak efficiency when the time comes to compete.

Paul deftly uses this illustration to speak to us about our lives as Christians. We too are running a race, the race of life. We too will want to go into strict training in order to obtain the prize, the prize of eternal life. But we can't gain that prize simply by our own training regimen. In fact, no matter how hard we trained, no matter how hard we competed, we would always fall short of our goal. But God has given us a champion who has competed in our place. Our substitute, Jesus, has won the victory for us already! He has given us the crown of life to wear on our heads. We are victorious because he was victorious.

But we aren't experiencing the joys of heaven just yet. We still have a race left to run here on earth. God still desires us to obey his will, not because it will earn us anything, but because we want to serve him for all that he has done for us. That's why we want to train with his Word. We want to make our bodies our slaves, so that they serve us and do what God desires rather than we serving our sinful nature and satisfying its desires. That's why we will take advantage of the spiritual opportunities our God has given us and use them to train. We don't want to simply go through the motions and take them for granted. That's what many of the children of Israel did. And they did not see their promised land as they died in the desert.

God has given us the victory through our Lord, Jesus Christ! Run the straight race through God's good grace. Lift up your eyes to see his face! Christ is the way before us lies, Christ is the Path and Christ the Prize!