

## 1 Cor. 9:24-27 “Healthy Competition”

**For the Children:** When I was in high-school I tried out for the long-distance running team. By the time I arrived back at the changing-rooms, everyone else had showered and gone home. That was the start and the finish of my long-distance running career! The problem was that I hadn't trained for it, wasn't really interested in it, and didn't persevere with it. The Bible compares the Christian life to a race or an athletic competition. If you want to live as a Christian, you have to be eager for it, train for it, and stick with it. We cannot do that in our own strength: we need the Lord's help. **Questions:** What sort of things might we have to give up in order to serve the Lord faithfully? What sort of exercises will help us in the Christian life? What is the prize awaiting us at the end of this “race”?

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### Introduction:

#### **First Point: Self-Discipline**

- 1) Putting Everything into It: Competing in athletics requires self-discipline and self-control. Abstinence and exercise are often needed in athletics training. Serving God sometimes requires giving up certain things – time and energy, worldly pleasures that undermine commitment; and exercising ourselves in the study of Scripture, prayer, worship, fellowship and obedience.
- 2) Competing against Self: The competition is not against other people, but against our own selves – especially our old nature. The apostle “buffets” his “body” – not literally, as with the ascetic practices of the past – rather, he strives to subdue his old nature and lead his body/self away as a “slave,” subject to God.
- 3) The Spirit's Discipline: Self-discipline for the Christian is actually the discipline/control of the Holy Spirit. The whole man must be subjected to God's Word, by the Spirit's power. *Self-discipline* – giving up things that hinder and exercising ourselves in things that help us spiritually – follows from the Spirit's control.

#### **Second Point: Playing to Win**

- 1) Fierce Determination: The Christian's “race” is completed by running it with the kind of attitude that leads an athlete to victory: with fierce determination and perseverance. The apostle does not run his race aimlessly, uncertainly. He has a fixed goal and brooks no interference. He's not a half-hearted shadow-boxer, but aims to land every punch
- 2) For a Better Prize: Athletes are often motivated by the prize that comes with victory – fame and fortune. Believers have a much better prize: eternal life in and with Jesus Christ. Of course, it is not earned but granted to us by grace. Nevertheless, those who have received this gift must show that they value it, by straining towards it.
- 3) A Special Calling: In Paul's case, he has an added reason to compete in this way: he is an apostle, called to herald the Gospel. The herald in the Greek games called out the rules and called the winners forward to receive their prize. It would be a shameful thing to then be disqualified himself for breaking the rules. This is not said to undermine assurance. Rather, it is a warning against taking our calling for granted, becoming complacent.

### Conclusion:

