

I. Introduction:

- A. I'm going to piggy-back this devotional onto Brother Fulton's lessons about running the Christian race.
1. This scripture refers to wrestling.
 2. It doesn't happen very often these days in the highly technical world of Olympic Sports, but it used to be that really good athletes competed in more than one sport – not just different events, but different sports.
 3. For example, a really good swimmer or runner today might enter several related races – 200 meters, 400 meters and a relay or two.
 4. But as far as I know no marathoner also entered the boxing or wrestling arena.
 5. However, when it comes to allegories of the Christian life, we get to do that.
- B. Bro. Austin's lessons from **Hebrews 12**, about running with patience the race that is set before us, have been a great blessing.
1. Was Austin using the words of Paul in the **Book of Hebrews** and that allegory about running?
 2. Were those Paul's thoughts as directed by the Holy Spirit or did someone else write **Hebrews**?
 3. The Bible doesn't tell us, and there are arguments both pro and con.
 4. But if we assume that Paul brought up the subject of **running the race**, and also about **wrestling** and even **boxing**, one might wonder if he was a nominal sports fan.
 5. Do you question my reference to boxing?
 6. Didn't Austin refer once or twice to **I Corinthians 9:24**?
 - a. *"Know ye not that they which **RUN in a race** run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.*
 - b. **I therefore so RUN**, not as uncertainly; **so FIGHT I**, not as one that **BEATETH** the air:
 - c. *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."*
 7. That word **"so fight I"** refers to boxing – or at least to fighting with the fist.
 8. Later Paul will say, *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."*
- C. Let's leave running and boxing and think about wrestling as another illustration of the Christian life.
1. I confess that I have never wrestled as an organized sport.
 - a. My wrestling has been confined to my sister and a few friends 60 years ago.
 - b. I know nothing of Greco-Roman rules or any other kind of wrestling rules for that matter.
 2. And in fact that might be considered a part of this lesson.
 3. I am going to assume that most of you haven't wrestled either.
 4. Living the Christian life is not something we were naturally born to do as sons of Adam.
 - a. We weren't running the Christian race – the race which Christ set before us – until we were born again.
 - b. And there was no need to wrestle against God's enemies until we became one of Christ's friends.
- D. Paul exhorts us – *"Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*
1. *For we **wrestle** not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."*
 2. Despite my ignorance of wrestling, I've jotted down a few things which might apply to the Christian life.

II. But consider a couple of comments and questions before we move forward.

- A. The word translated **"wrestle"** is unique to this particular scripture; it is found nowhere else in the Bible.
1. That in itself may suggest that Paul was a sports fan. In other words, it wasn't a common religious term.
 2. While this particular word may be rare, its root is somewhat more common to the New Testament.
 3. Strong says that it is a primary verb, meaning **"to throw"** in a more or less violent and intense manner.
 4. To be victorious in this wrestling match, you must pick up and throw down your opponent before pinning him to the ground – and some say he is to be pinned by the throat.
 5. In other words using a choke hold.

B. Now, notice the personal pronouns in this passage.

1. *“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”*

a. It would not be incorrect for me to add one word to that verse...

b. *“Finally, my brethren, be **YE** strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.*

c. *Put on the whole armour of God, that **YE** may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*

d. *For **WE** wrestle not against flesh and blood...”*

2. Who among God’s people does Paul **exclude** from this exhortation?

3. Is **Ephesians** written to Timothy or Titus, letting us conclude that this is to preachers or missionaries?

4. Is this confined only to those who are willing to train and prepare for the elite Christian Olympics?

5. No. This is an exhortation to everyone of us.

a. Because, whether we like it or not, Christ has set a race before us all us to run.

b. And like it or not, the devil is going to try to wrestle each of us to the dust if he can.

c. Satan wants to choke you into silence for Christ and into submission to him.

C. And a second question: when can we expect this wrestling match to be completed – to be called?

1. In the Olympics, a wrestling match takes exactly six and a half minutes – or less if a victory has been won.

2. There are two-three minute periods with a thirty second break in between.

3. But in the wrestling to which Paul refers there is no time-limit; no gong announcing the end of the round; and no referee to break apart the combatants.

4. This match begins the day when that sinner repents and trusts Christ, and it will never end so long as that new believer is still willing to wrestle against sin and God’s enemy.

a. Satan is going to do his best to keep that babe in Christ on his face with dust filling his mouth and blood running out his nose and ears.

b. He doesn’t relax when we are sick and weak; He doesn’t give anyone a break for their age or infirmity.

5. Only when **WE quit** or **give in** will the Devil relax his attack.

III. Okay, what are some of the characteristics of wrestling?

A. Unlike running a race, wrestling involves direct personal contact.

1. I told you a few months ago that I read a biography of **Eric Liddell** an Olympic gold medalist in running.

2. Also a few years ago I read a history of the **rowing team** from the University of Washington which won the Olympic gold medal at about the same time as Liddell.

3. Both books suggested that those racers tried to put the people against whom they were competing out of their minds. They concentrated their thoughts on their own race.

4. They focused their attention on the finish line or *“the prize which (was) set before them.”*

5. As we have been recently taught, we are to *“look unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.”*

B. But wrestling is entirely different, in that this is all about the opponent, the enemy.

1. This is personal – him and us – his strength and skill against whatever might be found in us.

2. The wrestler must look into his opponent’s eyes, & peripherally he must be aware of his torso & his hands.

3. If the wrestler is watching his coach for instructions and suggestions, he will be defeated in seconds.

4. In this aspect of the Christian life, we must have already spent hours, days and weeks in training under the watchful eye of the Lord.

5. In this allegory, during the heat of the battle our attention must be on our opponent.

6. Because this isn’t a match set before us by the Lord. It is the Devil who has picked this fight.

C. In the wrestling ring our opponent isn’t separated from us by the white lines marking different lanes.

1. We are in close personal proximity; this hands are reaching and grabbing; his legs are trying to trip us to the mat.

2. Mixing metaphors, this is why Paul tells us to be prepared with the Christian armor.

3. And like David, we need to have already spent time training in proper shield use and learning to use that sword.

- D. It is true for runners, swimmers and other Olympic competitors, but for wrestlers it is even more true – they battle with their entire bodies.
1. If their feet can't hold them when attacked, they will lose. Falling to the mat is the first step to defeat.
 - a. And if their arms can't lift their opponents, or thwart and parry the hands of the enemy, they will lose.
 - b. If their eyes can't see and anticipate the next move against them, they will be dropped to the mat.
 - c. Stomach muscles, and of course legs, have to be very well conditioned.
 - d. And hearts – their hearts have to be able to function far above the ordinary.
 2. Basically speaking, in a wrestling match when one combatant gets his opponent on the ground with both his shoulders pinned down, he has won.
 3. So Paul says, *“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”*
 4. It's all about standing; Yes, bow to the Saviour, and kneel in prayer.
 5. But before the enemy, it is our task to stand – *“and having done all, to stand.”*
 6. Paul implies that in order to be able to stand against the wiles of our enemy, we must prepare ourselves from head to foot.

IV. Now, a couple words about our opponent.

- A. *“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*
1. *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”*
 2. The antagonist in this match is the Devil – accompanied by his ambassadors of spiritual wickedness and the rulers of the darkness of this world.
- B. The very nature of these opponents require that we go back to **verse 10** – *“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the LORD, and in the power of HIS might.”*
1. No analogy is perfect – no type is perfect – and this one is no exception.
 2. Just because wrestling is a personal, one-on-one competition, that doesn't mean that the Christian must rely on his own strength and ability.
 3. We *“can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us,”* but in ourselves we are weak and whimpy wusses before Satan and his soldiers.
- C. But how can we *“be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might?”*
1. By preparation – that is pre-paration.
 2. By daily drawing strength from the Lord through prayer and daily preparation for this battle.
 3. We must learn our wrestling technique from our knowledge and application of the Word, which we read and study on a regular basis – before the match.
 4. We are *“not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of our ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.”*
 5. Since our opponents in this match are spiritual – an area about most of us know very little – we definitely need the Holy Spirit.
- D. Earlier, I mentioned the term *“Greco-Roman”* – as the style of today's Olympic wrestling.
1. As far as I know that is the style used in American high schools and colleges today. It's fairly universal.
 2. I can't define or describe it, and I can't give you the names of any other wrestling styles.
 3. Let's just say this style was used at the first modern Olympic Games in 1896 and has been included in every edition of the summer Olympics held since 1904.
 4. It is a **style** of wrestling, and it also involves **specific rules**.
 5. But those rules don't apply to the wrestling to which Paul refers.

- E. We are battling Satan – an amoral opponent – who wrestles according to his own agenda and rules.
1. For example, if he can get his hands on our throats, he'll squeeze the life out of us if possible.
 2. He's not averse to sticking his thumb in our eye to cause us pain & limit our ability to see what is going on.
 3. He'll bite off our ear, if that would keep us from hearing God's word and growing in Christ.
 4. He knows all about that thorn in our flesh, & he's not the least bit shy to drive it further & further into us.
 5. If the Devil knows that we've broken a couple ribs guarding our hearts, he'll drive his knee into our chest.
- F. And he is persistent.
1. He will not give up even though we may have thwarted his attacks a hundred times before.
 2. Many, many, many saints slowly give up the struggle against God's enemy the older they get.
 3. When they should be at their strongest, because the younger wrestlers around them need their example, they are giving up the fight.
 4. And the Devil is well aware that their flesh is weakening and their resolve is faltering.
- G. Satan's purpose is to keep us from advancing; keep us from serving and glorifying our coach and King.
1. **Our purpose** is victory for the glory of God; but **his purpose** is to keep us from that victory.
 2. Even if we can't in the midst of the struggle keep "*look unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith,*" at the very least we can remember the Saviour for whom we wrestle and call on Him for strength.
- H. While God is righteous, and our coach expects us to wrestle according to Heavenly rules, Satan will not.
1. That is guaranteed.
 2. You might say that puts us at a disadvantage, because the Devil is a cheat and a liar.
 3. But our obedience to the Lord will always be right and ultimately it will be a blessing and an advantage.
 4. God is not going to use us or strengthen us, if we dishonor Him in the way in which we serve Him.
 5. Therefore, "*Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*"
- I. There are many different illustrations of living the Christian life throughout the Bible.
1. There is walking the narrow road after entering in through the strait gate.
 2. There is building a wall around Jerusalem.
 3. There is running a marathon, or in the case of some saints, a quick sprint.
 4. There is fighting the good fight of faith.
 5. And there is wrestling.
 6. They all have different lessons to teach us. They all have blessings to leave us.