

Liberty Commentary March 16, 2009

I had the opportunity recently to go and watch the boys state high school basketball tournament at Wells Fargo Arena. The obvious conclusion after watching the game is that each player, coach and fan strives to do all that they can do to win the game. Each team competes with all their strength to be the winner. Each team wants to claim the prize of “champion”. The coaches push their team to strive for excellence so that they may win the ultimate prize of “state champions”.

The Apostle Paul was a man who strove to be the best that he could be. He often referred to the spiritual life as an athletic competition. Paul writes, “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Paul wanted to be a champion for Christ and cross the finish line ahead of the pack. As Paul was awaiting his execution he penned a very inspiring letter to a young man in the faith, Timothy. In II Timothy chapter two Paul writes to young Timothy what reads like a coaches half time pep talk to the team. In II Timothy 2:5 Paul portrays the Christian life as a portrait of an athlete. “And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.” Paul addresses Timothy as an athlete. Strive means to engage in an athletic contest. The believer is to contend and strive for the reward. Stay in the race and keep your eye on the goal, on the reward that awaits at the completion of life’s race.

There are five rewards that are available to be achieved for every believer who “strives lawfully” in the spiritual athletic contest of life.

- 1) The “incorruptible crown” that God offers to those who master the old sin nature-I Cor. 9:25
- 2) “Crown of life” for those who endure temptation-Rev. 2:10
- 3) “Crown of righteousness” for those who love the doctrine of the rapture. II Tim. 4:8

- 4) “Crown of rejoicing” for the soul winner. I Thes. 2:19
- 5) “Crown of glory” for faithful teachers and preachers. I Peter 5:2-4

At the judgment seat of Christ when the believer will stand before Jesus Christ, we will not be there to answer for our salvation or for our sin because that has already been settled here on earth. We will be judged for our service as stewards of Gods manifold grace.

God deals with the believer in three ways. 1) God dealt with me as a sinner before I was saved. I was condemned in my sins prior to receiving Christ as my Savior. 2) Now that I am saved, God deals with me no longer as a sinner, but as a son. I am an heir and joint heir with Jesus Christ. All that belongs to the Son belongs to me. I now have just as much right to be in heaven, as does Jesus. 3) One day at the judgment seat of Christ, Jesus will deal with me (us) as stewards and based on our faithfulness we will receive one or more of these five rewards mentioned in scripture.

In the basketball tournament the referee would call a foul and penalize the player and the team that did not obey the rules. In order to win the game the team must play by the rules and strive lawfully. Paul instructs Timothy, as well as us, that to win the prize in the spiritual race of life we must strive lawfully. We must play by Gods rules. As faithful stewards we must not break Gods rules of the game. God keeps impeccable records. As the umpire of the game, God calls the fouls real close. One does not break Gods rules and get away with it.

Paul had lived above reproach since he became a believer. Paul had endured much affliction and false accusations by his own countrymen the Jews. In Acts 24:5, the Jews accuse Paul of being a “pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: who hath gone about to profane the temple”. Paul was falsely

accused of being a traitor to the Jews. They said things about Paul that was not true. Paul responded in love. Paul writes, “My hearts desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved”. (Romans 10:1) God will answer that prayer one day.

Often our response is to seek revenge toward those who misrepresent us and say hurtful and untrue things about us. Our natural instinct is to make them pay for what they have done.

Paul tells Timothy to strive lawfully with pure motives. Do the right thing the right way. God keeps the books and he will balance the books one day. We are not the umpire, we are the athlete competing against the world, the flesh and the devil. It is our duty to follow orders of our coach the Lord Jesus Christ and play by the rules with the right motives, right attitudes, right actions, right reactions and endure affliction and difficulties as a good soldier of Jesus Christ knowing that there awaits for us at the end of the race our reward if we strive lawfully.

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