

Liberty Commentary February 4, 2008

We recently watched or read the details to the conclusion of the great American athletic competition that takes place this time each year known as the Super Bowl.

Every football player from grade school to the NFL aspires to attain the ultimate prize of achieving a Super Bowl championship.

As the two teams prepared for the great conquest the athletes on both teams focused their sites on the coveted goal of attaining the Super Bowl ring. For the last two weeks leading up to the competition the athletes would spend long days in preparation for the competition. They would watch hours of film trying to study each move and play that the other team might employ. They restricted their personal time with their families, friends and associations so that they could focus all their time and attention to the task of winning the championship.

The Apostle Paul talks about winning a championship as well. Paul uses the backdrop of the great Isthmian games in Greece (equivalent to our Super Bowl) to illustrate the similarities between an athletic competition and the Christian life. Paul writes to the Corinthians instructing them how they are to live the Christian life. Paul says to the Corinthian believers, “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 (the prize) is temperate in all things”.

Paul was not telling the Corinthians that they needed to try to do their best so that God would be inclined to let them into heaven. Paul had already indicated that the only way to heaven is to receive Jesus Christ as Savior by faith. Not by works. Paul is referring to the heavenly crowns that are available to each believer based on our service to Christ.

Paul says to the Corinthians that in order to win the competition, to win the prize, one must be temperate in all things. The athlete is free to do as he pleases but if he is to win the prize he must exercise self-restraint and self-discipline. There will be long days of preparation. He will need to restrict his diet to only those things that will provide energy and strength for the competition. The athlete must restrict his activities and his associations and maybe even some friendships while he is focused on the goal of winning the prize. Paul says to the Corinthian Christians, use this as an example as you strive to be a champion for Christ.

The Hebrew writer instructs us in chapter 12 on how the Christian is to live their life in order that they may attain the prize. “Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us and let us run with patience (perseverance) the race that is set before us looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith...”.

If we are to be a champion for Christ and excel in our Christian life we must first know Christ as our Savior. We must accept His blood atonement on the cross for our sins by faith. Then we must understand that the Christian life is not limited to just the measure of grace that God bestows upon us to save us from our sins, but we must realize that God’s grace extends beyond saving grace to sanctifying grace. That is the grace that is available to every Christian to persevere in the Christian life and be a champion in the race of life.

Hebrews chapter 12 expounds upon what Paul is telling the Corinthians and gives us three practical principles on how we are to run the race and be a champion for Christ.

First, we should persevere and strive for the prize because of the great example that we have through the Old Testament and New Testament saints alike. They remained faithful and persevered and won the prize therefore if they did it we likewise can do it.

Secondly, we are to run the race and put forth the effort to be a champion for Christ after we have first rid our lives of every hindrance, every vice, every sin, every bad habit that we know will trip us up and impede our relationship with Christ. We are not likely to win the prize if we hold on to some vice, sin, evil habit or grudge.

Third, we run the race and strive for the mastery by looking unto Jesus who is the ultimate example and coach. Just as we looked to Jesus to save us from our sins we must look to Jesus to give us the grace and strength we need to persevere in the Christian life and produce in us the qualities of a champion.

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