

RUN IN SUCH A WAY TO WIN

Paul was the “striving” apostle who ran the race of *the* faith as he pressed on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, which refers to being counted worthy to attain to the *out*-resurrection or the first resurrection from among the dead that is reserved for the conquerors of Christ. Paul was a conqueror!

The “striving” apostle.

Some people might object to calling Paul the “striving” apostle because the word *striving* might imply something negative, as someone who is always agitated and not resting in the Lord and in His peace. Actually, as we will see, for Paul and every believer who is seeking to conquer or overcome and receive an abundant entrance into the kingdom, the word *striving* is a very positive word. In many ways, it is like the word *diligent*, which was stressed by Peter in his letter (2 Peter 1.10, 15; 3.14) as well as by Paul (2 Corinthians 8.22; Ephesians 4.3; 2 Timothy 2.15; Hebrews 4.11).

Paul was a man of passion. His passion was the Lord Jesus Christ, and that he might know Him and be found in Him at the end of the race of *the* faith. Paul sought with his whole being to gain Christ (Philippians 3.8) and to walk worthy of the God who called him into His own kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2.12; 2 Thessalonians 1.5). Paul threw off every encumbrance and pursued Christ with such a passion that it led to his martyrdom at the hands of Rome.

Paul saw himself in a race that had to be run to the finish line. His goal was to run this race according to the rules, to win the race, and to receive the prize of the victor’s crown. His race was a race of *the* faith, which is more than holding to a belief in the atoning work of Christ. *The* faith refers to the hope that is laid up for us in heaven (Colossians 1.5), the inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away (1 Peter 1.4), the hope of glory (Colossians 1.27), the very kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2.12). *The* faith is intimately joined with the coming of the King when He takes the scepter of the kingdom of the heavens and the kingdom of this world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Revelation 11.15). Holding to *the* faith says that all the promises of God in Christ are true, and we will come into them *if* we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end (Hebrews 3.6). Hope does not allow us to be passive; it demands us to run.

Paul saw himself as an athlete, even a boxer who had to beat his body into subjection as a slave to achieve the goal that was set before him. This passionate apostle continually pressed on toward the goal for the prize that he saw set before him and all Christians. To Paul, the race was not a passive walk. It was something he had to strive, even agonize to complete. He saw it as something to win through a

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disciplined life of self-control, much like an athlete who has one goal in view, and that is to win the race for the prize.

Paul did not come to use the word *strive* as an original thought. It came from his Master. The word *strive* was first used by Jesus as He spoke about the entrance into the kingdom.

“Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.” (Luke 13.24 NASB; also Matthew 7.13-14)

The word *strive* comes from the Greek word *agonizomai*, which means “to struggle or to strive, such as in a competition for a prize or in contention with an adversary.” It is also the word from which we get our English word *agonize*. Therefore, the word *strive* implies more than mere effort; it implies an intense effort to reach a certain goal, whether it is in a competition to win a prize or to beat an adversary. We could say that there is an agonizing to achieve a certain goal. However, there is a motive behind reaching the goal, and that is to receive a prize or a reward for successfully reaching the goal. Another way of stating this is that the goal is to receive the prize.

One who is striving according to the rules is one who strains through a narrow entrance to enter the coming kingdom of Christ in the next eon. This narrow entrance is likened to a race to be won. We are to cast aside every weight and encumbrance that might hinder us from running the race of *the* faith and figuratively squeeze ourselves through this narrow gate. Anything that is of no value in running this race is to be cast aside so that we can press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Hebrews 12.1-2; Philippians 3.7-14).

Paul heeded the words of his Master to strive to enter the kingdom; therefore, it is only right that he be called the “striving” apostle. In fact, every Christian should be known as a “striving” disciple of Christ, for this is what it takes to enter *the reign of the heavens* in the oncoming eon. Our true rest comes when the seventh day of rest comes. Let us not settle down on this earth, as if we have arrived, because we will not arrive until our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, comes from heaven in the glory of His Father with His reward (Matthew 16.27; Revelation 22.12). Until then, we are to heed the many exhortations related to the kingdom so that we will have an abundant entrance (2 Peter 1.10-11) and receive the full reward (2 John 8).

Paul saw a danger for himself, as well as for every child of God. The danger is not being counted worthy to attain to the age that is coming (Luke 20.35), even to be disqualified from reigning with Christ in the next eon. However, let us be very clear that this is not about our initial salvation by grace through faith, which is a gift of God for all who believe in this eon. We can never be in danger of losing our salvation. What we can be in danger of is not being a conqueror or overcomer who is counted worthy to attain to the resurrection and transfiguration that will place one as a son in the oncoming eon to reign with Christ.

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Thus, the word *striving* is most appropriate; for set before us is a race to be run, and our goal must be to finish the race in such a fashion that we will receive the victor's prize, a crown, and reign with Christ in His Kingdom, to participate with Him as He sums up all things in the heavens and on the earth. As long as it is today, we are to be running the race of *the* faith to win and to receive the prize.

Run to win.

The clearest explanation of this matter of running the race to win is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthian believers.

And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it. Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but {only} one receives the prize? **Run in such a way that you may win.** And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then {do it} to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore **I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.** (1 Corinthians 9.23-27 NASB)

Paul sought to be a partaker of the very gospel that he preached, which was the full gospel, the whole purpose of God. He testified of the gospel of the grace of God, and he preached the kingdom (Acts 20.24-27). In other words, God's whole purpose is to see the lost saved and the saved to come into the kingdom of His Son for the millennial kingdom of Christ. The word *partaker* means "companion, sharer or an associate"; but notice that Paul did not state he *was* a companion of the gospel but that he *may become* a companion of the gospel. He was seeking to be a fellow partaker (co-participant) with the Corinthians, whom he was admonishing for being carnal, not spiritual (1 Corinthians 3.1-3).

Oh, when we read Paul's epistles, we often are left wondering. What was going through Paul's mind? Even Peter acknowledged that some of what Paul spoke was difficult to understand and unstable people twisted his words (2 Peter 3.16). How could Paul, who was entrusted with the whole purpose of God, say that he did all things so that he *may become* a partaker of the same gospel that he taught? What did Paul mean? To answer this question, we need to understand Paul's gospel. Today, when the word *gospel* is spoken amongst Christians, most, if not all, immediately think of the gospel of the grace of God that is preached to the lost. However, Paul's gospel was much greater than this. It is true that Paul was sent to preach the good news to the nations; but in reading his epistles, we discover that Paul focused much more on spiritual growth and maturity of the saints who are being called into the kingdom.

One example of the breadth of Paul's gospel is found in his epistle to the Colossians.

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We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as {it has been doing} in you also since the day you heard {of it} and understood the grace of God in truth.... (Colossians 1.3-6 NASB)

Notice that Paul included in his gospel the hope laid up for you which through the gospel is constantly bearing fruit and increasing. Now, some people who see all Scripture as focusing on the lost will immediately think Paul was dealing with initial salvation, but this was not his focus. The hope laid up for you deals directly with *the mature* knowledge and *the* faith, which means the coming kingdom is in view (Colossians 1.13, 27; 3.1, 4).

Bearing fruit is a kingdom matter. In reference to the word of the kingdom, the Lord spoke of the seed falling onto good soil and bearing fruit, some a hundred-fold, some sixty, and some thirty (Matthew 13.23). But some fruit are good fruit, just as there are good figs; some fruit are bad fruit, just as there are bad figs.

A day will come when many will say, "Lord, Lord." However, the Lord Jesus will deny them because they did not do the will of the Father; instead, they practiced lawlessness (Matthew 7.21-23; 2 Timothy 2.12). They bore bad fruit. In God's house, there are vessels for honor and vessels for dishonor (2 Timothy 2.20). Ancient Israel is our example, for they were called to bear fruit and failed; and in the current dispensation, the ecclesia of God has been called out as the nation to bear fruit (Matthew 21.43; 1 Peter 2.9). However, just as Israel failed to bear fruit, so many in the ecclesia will fail to bear fruit to the glory of God (Matthew 7.15-27; 25.24-30; Luke 19.20-26). They will be disqualified to attain to the first resurrection and will have to wait in death until the general resurrection, after the 1,000-year reign of Christ, in order to put on immortality.

Paul was in daily, continual prayer for those to whom he ministered, and we discover the objective of his prayer as we read further in his letter to the Colossians.

For this reason also, since the day we heard {of it} we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please {Him} in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. (Colossians 1.9-12 NASB)

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Paul's purpose was that they would walk worthy of the Lord, pleasing Him, because there is an inheritance awaiting the saints in light, which speaks loudly of entering the coming kingdom either through the *out*-resurrection (for those asleep in Christ) or the transfiguration (for those who are alive and remain when He comes at the commencement of the Tabernacles Age). God's highest goal for His people is for them to come into the inheritance of glorified bodies, and this is what Paul had in view when he wrote to the Corinthians that he might become a partaker of the gospel which he preached.

In other words, the gospel (that is, the whole purpose of God expressed as the good news) is not some static teaching but something for which we are to strive so that we will be counted worthy to partake of it in the coming age. We are being beckoned to become a companion of Christ in His coming kingdom as He sums up all things in the heavens and on the earth (Ephesians 1.11). We are called to be **His body, the complement of the One completing the all in all** (Ephesians 1.23 cv). Paul was striving to inherit the kingdom, but when he wrote the Corinthian letter, he acknowledged that he had no assurance that he would receive the inheritance. On the contrary, Paul was concerned that he would be disqualified from the inheritance: **Lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.** The word *disqualified* means "unapproved" or "rejected." Paul saw a danger for himself and for all Christians, and this danger deals with losing the right to reign with Him during the Kingdom or Tabernacles Age.

This does not mean that such a one will lose his or her immortality. Immortality is a gift to all who believe. The issue is when one will enter into immortality. Will it be through the first resurrection at the end of our present wicked eon, or will it be through the general resurrection 1,000 years later?

This is why Paul wrote to the Corinthians, likening the Christian life to a race that has to be run and won. **Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but {only} one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.** Races are to be won, not lost, so run that *you* may win. Why would Paul write such a thing unless it was possible not to win the race? The possibility of failing to reach the goal that is set before every Christian was a serious matter to Paul, and, for this reason, he often exhorted and encouraged the saints to run the race as he was running the race (Philippians 3.17).

The word for *race* in the Greek is *stadion*, which means "a stade or certain measure of distance; by implication, a stadium or racecourse." The English word *stadium* is derived from *stadion*. Thus, the word *race* implies a fixed course. It is not running to and fro, as if aimlessly running; but rather, it is running on a fixed course for a fixed distance. In other words, there are constraints attached to the race. A person cannot run the race in any manner he chooses. There are rules (God's Divine laws) and there are boundaries, and these are discovered in the word of God under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the Holy Spirit could be likened to a coach. Every good athlete has a good coach who leads him to victory.

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When we yield ourselves to the leadership of the spirit of God, we will run the race in the proper manner.

This race that every believer is enrolled in is a competition not against other believers but against oneself, the flesh, as well as the world and the devil. Paul likened the battle to an athletic contest in which an athlete must strive to receive a crown for victory. **And every man that striveth** (competes) **for the mastery is temperate** (self-control) **in all things** (1 Corinthians 9.25 KJV). Everyone who competes in athletic games (such as soccer), or “strives for mastery” in a sport, exercises self-control or is temperate in all things. Have you ever heard of an Olympic gold medalist winning a contest without mastery of the sport in which he competes? Athletes who win are ones who spend hours on end training to master their sport. To prepare for a contest requires great discipline and self-control in every aspect of an athlete’s life. In fact, we could say that athletes agonize in their preparation to compete, and then when they do compete, they exercise the same self-control and endurance. Every ounce of their being is poured into winning. They agonize to win. Paul has painted this exact picture for us.

The words *compete* and *strive* come from the Greek word *agonizomai*, which, as we have seen, means “to strive,” “to struggle” or “to compete for a prize.” So we could say that Paul exhorts Christians to *agonize* in the race (the race of *the* faith), exercising self-control. In other words, we are to *agonize* to control our fleshly passions so as to run this race and reach the end in victory. If we give in to our flesh and walk according to the flesh, we will not reach the end but be taken off the track (Romans 8.13-14). We will be overcome by the flesh instead of overcoming the flesh.

In the midst of his exhortation, Paul reminded the Corinthians of the purpose of striving or agonizing in the race of *the* faith. **They then {do it} to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.** Athletes of the world run to receive a perishable wreath or crown, but athletes running for the kingdom run to receive an imperishable crown. Crown speaks of reigning in the coming kingdom of God’s Son. The world runs after things that will not last and which do not have any heavenly or kingdom value. As Christians, we are to run for the hope that is laid up for us in heaven, to be received in the day of Christ. Because of this on-high calling and this glorious prize, Paul ran with purpose. **Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty** (NKJ). Paul was certain about the goal set before him. He had no doubt that the kingdom of the Son and reigning in His kingdom are a certainty for all who run the race in the proper fashion.

Receiving an imperishable crown was essential to Paul. In America, there are three major horse racing events that horse owners and jockeys seek to win each year. Only the most fit and fastest horse can win all three races in one season. It is referred to as the **Triple Crown** because if one horse wins all three races, then the owner of the horse receives three victories (crowns). This is the height of victory in horse racing. Although he only mentioned **the crown of righteousness** in his epistles, Paul obviously was going for the triple crown of the celestial (heavenly)

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kingdom—**the crown of glory** (1 Peter 5.4), **the crown of righteousness** (2 Timothy 4.8), and **the crown of life** (James 1.12; Revelation 2.10). Paul is our example, and we are to run the race for the **Triple Crown** as well.

Paul's goal was to win the prize; and to do this, he saw the necessity of boxing as a fighter, buffeting his body, lest he be disqualified from the contest. **I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.** This is one of the clearest indications that a believer might not receive a crown to reign with Christ if he does not run in the proper fashion. Paul was not wasting time by beating the air and not accomplishing anything. Instead, he was taking concrete action to discipline himself so that he might run. It was as if he saw his flesh as the enemy and he had to fight it with all that he had to make it his slave so that he could run. This is what he was preaching to others that they must do, so he too had to “walk the talk.” It wasn't merely good sermon material to Paul. His goal was reigning in the coming kingdom, and he saw the great danger of falling short of this goal. It was a matter of winning or losing the inheritance of the kingdom. To win requires, even demands, total commitment, even to the point that we do not love our own life. **“If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate...even his own life, he cannot be My disciple”** (Luke 14.26 NASB).

We discover a similar word as Paul was about to depart from the elders of the church at Ephesus. Paul knew he would not see their faces again, so he summed up his life to them. He had determined to finish the race, no matter what the cost, no matter what the obstacle. Nothing was going to stop Paul from finishing his race, even with joy.

But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, **so that I may finish my race with joy**, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20.24 NKJ)

In this verse, the word *race* is not from the Greek word *stadion* but from *dromos*, which has the meaning of race or career. Some translations use the word *course*. Paul's course was to complete all that the Lord had called him to do in service. It could be said that Paul's race was two-fold. Paul was given a course or career by the Lord that he had to finish at all cost, and, in doing this work, his life had to match the very gospel of which he was testifying. Another way of stating this is that the messenger and the message had to be the same. He had to be a partaker (living testimony) of the gospel he preached so that he will partake of it in the age (eon) to come. Paul knew that if he ran his race in such a fashion, then at the judgment seat of Christ he will hear from his Master: **“Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord”** (Matthew 25.23 NKJ). As we will see, Paul received this assurance before his departure.

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A race of endurance and hope.

Paul expressed the same passion in his letter to the Hebrews. [Paul seems to be the most likely writer of Hebrews.]

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and **let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus**, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12.1-2 NASB)

The word *race* is from another Greek word, *agon*, which means “a place of assembly (as if led), i.e. (by implication) a contest (held there); figuratively, an effort or anxiety.” *Agon* is the root word from which *agonizomai* or the English word *strive* comes. Thus, again, we are presented with a race that requires effort on our part, even agonizing to complete the race. For this reason, it is an endurance race. All who endure to the end conquer!

Anything and everything that interferes with running the race with the goal of winning must be shed from our lives so that we can run with endurance to the end. One thing that all athletes must have to compete and to win is endurance. If they start out strong but have no endurance to finish, then they will not win. It is the same with us who are in the race of *the* faith. We must have endurance to reach the end. In fact, we are commanded by our Lord to endure.

The Lord Jesus encouraged the church at Philadelphia (and those who hold to the Philadelphia heart today): **“Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown”** (Revelation 3.10-11 NKJ). We are commanded to persevere, and if we do, there is a crown awaiting us.

The word *persevere* has the meaning of “cheerful (hopeful) endurance or constancy.” In other words, there is hope attached to our persevering or enduring, and there also is an element of consistency (constancy), with a sense of cheerfulness attached to it. We are to be cheerful because we know that the reward will be great if we endure to the end (2 Timothy 2.12; Hebrews 10.35). Another way of stating this is that we are exhorted to hopefully and consistently endure or persevere. This is precisely what an athlete does to win a competition. An athlete does not train long hours with an expectation that he will lose. On the contrary, all the hard work is for one goal, and that is to win. Who ever heard of an athlete training and all the while telling himself that he will never win? He is defeated before he even enters the contest. His hope is that he will win, and this drives him even more to train for the contest. Another aspect of the training is consistency. Each day the athlete must train in such a way that it prepares him to compete, and this requires, even

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demands, a consistent routine every day. He cannot let up for one day or decrease his level of intense training, discipline and self-control if he expects to win. In like fashion, we too are exhorted to be diligent in our daily routine of discipline and self-control.

But, dear saints, please do not take this to be some sort of heavy message, as if we must be constantly perspiring and going about our days as if we are in pain. This is not what this means. Actually, we cannot do this on our own, and, if we try to do it on our own, we will soon discover that we will fail. It will lead to great frustration and unnecessary guilt. We can do nothing apart from Christ. The way for us to learn discipline and self-control is by the spirit of God. For this reason, Paul exhorted that we must walk by the spirit not by the flesh. If we try to do it on our own, then we are trying to do it by the flesh. This will not work. After all, Paul also exhorted the Galatians: **Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?** (Galatians 3.3 NASB). At times, Paul's exhortations might seem contradictory, but they are not if we understand that the source of our strength is through the spirit and, I might add, by grace. So, please do not take anything that is written in this article to cause you to move onto the ground of the flesh. Christ has set you free!

By the spirit of God we press on and we persevere.

As the Lord's people who are in the race of *the* faith, why do we persevere? Because we have a hope or expectation (a better word)! Our expectation is laid up for us in heaven, for when our Lord Jesus comes from heaven to receive us, as His people, in the air, He will reward us for our faithfulness (running the race, enduring to the end) while He has been gone. What is the hope or expectation? It is the hope of glory (Colossians 1.27), a redeemed, glorified body like His; the hope of reigning with Christ; the hope of being one of the many sons who will be brought to glory (Hebrews 2.10); the hope of becoming part of the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God (Hebrews 11.10), which, following the millennial reign, will come down out of heaven, having the glory of God (Revelation 21.10-11). What is our ultimate hope? It is to stand in the presence of the love of our life with overflowing joy and love and finally see Him face to face. This is our hope or expectation. This thought alone should drive us to press on with an intense passion for the Lord. Our beloved Lord Jesus will be joyous to see His lovely, spotless, holy and blameless body (Ephesians 1.4; 5.27; Philippians 1.10; Colossians 1.22; Hebrews 12.2; 2 Peter 3.14). Hallelujah! Jude best sums up this glorious thought of hope.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, {be} glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24-25 NASB)

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He alone is able to keep us, but we have a responsibility to endure or persevere to the end. Our hope is driven by His love. His love will cause us to stand in His presence (1 John 4.17). Until that day, we are to run the race of *the* faith in a consistent manner. How are we to be consistent? We are to be consistent in our daily abiding in Christ, in our walk in the spirit, and in our feeding upon the word of God. Most of all, we are to be consistent in our love relationship with our beloved Lord Jesus. We are to know Him, and this only comes as we spend time alone with Him. As we know Him more intimately, we will hear His loving voice: **Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.** There is no one in the whole universe that is more desirous to hand crowns to His blood-bought people than the Lord Jesus Himself.

There was a joy set before the Lord as He endured the cross, despising the shame (Hebrews 12.2). That joy was seeing the many sons come to glory (Hebrews 2.10). As we endure, we are to fix our eyes upon the One who is in glory and run the race of *the* faith, trusting in the One who will bring us into His kingdom and glory. As we see Jesus, we too will see the joy that is set before us because He is our joy.

Let us lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us. Let us run with cheerful, hopeful endurance the race that is set before us. Let us run for the **Triple Crown**. Jesus is set before us, and we must strive to press on toward our beloved Lord. He is standing at the finish line, beckoning us to run the race as He ran the race. But there are worldly and sinful encumbrances that lie in the path. They entangle us; they trip us up; they weigh us down so that we do not run as we should; or they cause us to sit out the race entirely. Let us turn from every encumbrance and sin, fixing our eyes upon Jesus, the One who loves us with a love that is drawing us to Himself.

Otherwise you also will be cut off.

It is tempting to stop at this point and merely dwell upon the beauty of our Lord; however, we must press on in our understanding of this matter of running the race of *the* faith. There are great dangers along the way, and we must be wise to heed the exhortations that warn us. If we do not heed the warnings, we could find ourselves falling short of the goal that is set before us. Who wants to miss the intimate relationship with the Victor that awaits all who have run the race to win?

To drive this point home, Paul used a real-life example of ones who did not run the race with endurance—the nation of Israel when they were called out of Egypt to receive their inheritance, to enter the Promised Land.

Israel had everything that Christians do. They were a saved people just like Christians are today. The blood was applied, they were baptized into Moses, they had the Rock who was Christ; and yet, the first generation fell in the wilderness due to unbelief (1 Corinthians 10.1-5; Hebrews 3.19).

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But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. (1 Corinthians 10.5-6 NKJ)

Many Israelites lost the race because they did not overcome by faith (Hebrews 4.2). Instead, they fell into sin, lusting after evil things, and their bodies became corpses that never saw the Promised Land. Simply, they walked according to the flesh! Paul warns us.

And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.” Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. (1 Corinthians 10.7-10 NKJ)

Who can deny that these evils exist amongst Christians today as they do amongst the lost in the world? Idolatry is anything that robs Christ from being the center of our lives. When we take our eyes off the Lord and do not sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts (1 Peter 3.15), then we are heading down the path of idolatry. Idolatry, sexual immorality, and all forms of lusting are included in the deeds of the flesh, and for this reason, Paul often wrote of the dangers of living according to the flesh and not according to the spirit (Romans 8.12-14; Galatians 5.16-25). Idolatry, immorality, and lusting of the flesh will lead to being disqualified to inherit the coming kingdom (1 Corinthians 6.9-10; Galatians 5.19-21; Ephesians 5.5). But again, we need to be reminded that we have been given every provision to not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit.

The Lord had offered Israel the greatest inheritance of any nation that has existed on earth—to come into a land promised by God in which God would be their Protector, Defender, and Provider. They had absolutely nothing to fear. All they had to do was to believe God and obey Him. They were given the most tremendous promise, but it was conditional—obedience was required.

“Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.” (Exodus 19.5-6 NASB)

Can you imagine what was set before this nation of called-out (ecclesia) people who stood before Christ in the wilderness? They were being offered the right to be a kingdom of priests on earth. This was an offer of the kingdom of God on earth, to become a theocratic nation under God. The nations of the world would have been blessed through Israel if the ancient nation had come into all that God had called it

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to be in His sight (Genesis 22.18). But their history is filled with victory and defeat, glory and shame. In the end, the first generation of saved Hebrews was disqualified from entering the Promised Land. In other words, it could be said that they lost the right to come into their full inheritance—saved from the world (Egypt) but disqualified from reigning as a kingdom of priests in the Promised Land.

Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. (1 Corinthians 10.11-12 NKJ)

Through the Corinthians, Paul warns us that Israel serves as our example. If those who had applied the blood and were called out could fall, then, as Paul warns, we too who have applied the blood and are called out could fall in a like manner. **Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.** If there were no possibility of us falling like Israel, then Paul's words would be meaningless, but the word of God does not waste words. It is a warning.

To the Romans, Paul gave a very similar warning in reference to the ancient nation of Israel, which was cut off when they rejected the offer of the kingdom and cried out for the crucifixion of their Messiah.

You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; **otherwise you also will be cut off.** (Romans 11.19-22 NASB)

Dear brethren, please hear these words: **Otherwise you also will be cut off.** These are not words to read over, as if they do not apply to us. On the contrary, *you also* collectively includes every blood-bought saint of God. From what could we be cut off? We could be cut off from the same thing from which Israel was cut off—entering the coming kingdom of God, or, if you will, becoming enjoyers of the glorification in the Tabernacles Age.

The phrase *cut off* comes from the Greek word *kopto*, which means “to chop” or “to beat the breast in grief.” If one is disqualified or unapproved to reign in the on-coming kingdom, then he will be like those who died in the wilderness. Instead of being a conqueror in Christ (or through Christ), he has been conquered by the world, the flesh, and the devil. Such a one will have saved his soul in this life only to lose it in the age to come (Matthew 16.25-26). If the conquered one dies or falls asleep in Christ before His second coming, then he will remain in the place of death (in Christ) until the great white throne judgment at which time he (or she) will be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Corinthians 3.15). In other words, immortality for the conquered will not come until the millennial reign of Christ over this earth is completed. In similar fashion, the ones that did not conquer who are alive

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and remain when Christ comes will not put on immortality at the time but will remain subject to death in the coming kingdom on earth. For those who are saved in this eon, it is not a question of putting on immortality; it is a question of when.

Run the race by the spirit.

Running the race is vital to our being qualified to enter *the reign of the heavens*, and this requires that we heed the words of our Lord and lose our soul life. The first generation of Israelites sought to save their soul life and was disqualified from entering the Promised Land (representative of Christians entering *the reign of the heavens*). If we seek to gain our soul life through a *self-centered* life in this day, then we will lose our soul life in the Kingdom Age. We will not enter into the righteousness, peace, and joy of the kingdom (Matthew 25.21, 23; Romans 14.17).

Let us be clear that losing our soul life is not losing our identity. It is turning from a life that is centered on self (*I, my, mine*) to a life that is centered on Christ [*It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me* (Galatians 2.20)].

Three verses pull this thought together; two are from our Lord (Matthew 16.25; John 12.25) and one is from Paul (Romans 8.12-13). The apostles only taught what they had been taught by the Lord, either directly or by the Holy Spirit. When he wrote to the Romans, Paul was merely explaining the teaching of Christ (2 John 9).

The following chart brings these three verses together.

Matthew 16.25	John 12.25	Romans 8.12-13
“For whoever wishes to save his life...	“He who loves his life...	So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh ...
shall lose it;	loses it;	you must die ;
but whoever loses his life for My sake...	and he who hates his life in this world (<i>kosmos</i>)...	but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body,
shall find it.” [save it (Luke 9.24)] [preserve it (Luke 17.33)]	shall keep it to life eternal [life <i>age-during</i> (YLT)].”	you will live .

If we lose our soul life in this day, then we will gain it in the day to come. We will live! We will live the *life age-during* or *eonian life* (Greek text), which refers to living in the age to come and into the ages of ages (eons of the eons) that follow.

How do we live this life? There is only one way. The spirit must lead us. In his letters to the Romans and the Galatians, Paul defined the process of losing the soul and the outcome of this process.

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For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (Romans 8.14 NASB)

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. (Galatians 5.16 NASB)

If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. (Galatians 5.25 NASB)

For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal [age-during (YLT)/eonian life (CV)] life. (Galatians 6.8 NASB)

We must be led by and walk by the spirit. This is our way to the abundant entrance into the kingdom. Only the spirit of God can lead us away from the desires of the flesh, away from the *self*-centered life and into the *Christ*-centered life. But notice that there are two outcomes—sonship and age-during life (eonian life, life in the coming eons), which represent coming into the inheritance of the kingdom. Israel's entrance into the Promised Land was about *sonship* and the *inheritance*. **Thus says the LORD, "Israel is My son, My first-born"** (Exodus 4.22).

God's law about sonship has not changed. Those who are the true Jew and the true Israel of God today, the believers in Christ Jesus, the ones with the circumcised hearts, are called to enter the celestial kingdom in the same fashion that they might come into *sonship* and receive the *inheritance* of glorified bodies in the image of Christ. Believers are children of God; but they must grow up to be adopted as sons, meaning that they must be placed as sons in the kingdom. In his letter to the Romans, Paul brought this matter to light.

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" (Romans 8.15 NASB)

If the spirit of God is leading us, then we have within us a spirit that cries out to our Father to be qualified or placed as a son in the kingdom that we might receive the adoption as sons (Galatians 4.5).

And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for {our} adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. (Romans 8.23 NASB)

When does the redemption of the body come about? It comes about when Christ comes in the glory of His kingdom. God has purposed that through Christ, every born from above child of God has a right to be placed as a son in the kingdom.

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He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Ephesians 1.5-6 NASB)

It is God's kind intention that each and every one of His children should be placed as sons. But according to the teaching of Christ and the elaboration of this teaching by Paul, we must be led by and walk by the spirit. If we are, then we have the assurance that we will be placed as a son in the kingdom, receiving our portion or share of the inheritance in the kingdom (Colossians 3.24) and reigning with Christ. If we sow to the spirit, we will reap to age-during or eonian life. We will not be like the Israelites who sowed to the flesh and lost their lives and their inheritance. We will enter the fullness of the coming kingdom. We will live!

Before moving on to the qualities necessary to run the race, there are a few points that I must make in regard to the matter of the soul and our inner man, what could be called the new **I**.

First, the soul is not immortal and has no life apart from the body. It is a safe assumption that many Christians see the soul as something that goes on after the death of the body. However, the soul of the flesh is in the blood (Leviticus 17.11), so once the blood is drained out of the body the soul is no longer alive. It simply goes to the place of the unseen or the dead. (For more on this matter, see my book titled *The Purpose and Plan of the Eons*, Volume 2, Chapter 1, *The Dead Know nothing Whatsoever*.) Given this understanding of the soul, to me, the salvation of the soul refers to receiving eonian life in the coming eon. One who is disqualified to reign with Christ in His millennial kingdom loses his soul life in the kingdom because he will not rise from the dead in the first resurrection but must remain in death until the general or second resurrection. Eonian life is about living in the joy of the kingdom of Christ for 1,000 years.

Second, Paul wrote that it was no longer I who lives but Christ who lives in me. However, Paul did not mean that there is no longer an **I** in the believer as if all identity is lost. On the contrary, he saw a new **I** in the believer. In reference to sin, Paul wrote: **So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me** (Romans 7.17 NASB). Of course, there is much that could be said about Romans 7, but I simply want to make the point that Paul had a new **I** in him that was not capable of sinning. It was what he also called the inner man. **For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man** (Romans 7.22 NASB). Notice how Paul did not do away with the law of God but concurred with it. This in itself is another subject that is beyond the scope of this article, but it is one you are encouraged to consider. The law is good!

However, remaining with the subject at hand, John concurred with this matter of the new **I** that does not sin.

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Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. (1 John 3.4-9 NASB)

Sin is lawlessness. The inner man, the new **I**, does not sin because it concurs with the law of God. Simply, the inner man is law abiding and practices the righteousness of God. John gives a clear indication of why the inner man does not sin; it is born of God. In other words, when we first believe by the grace of God through the faith of the Son of God, the Father impregnates, if you will, with His seed, that is, the very life of His Son, Christ in you. This seed is an embryo that is to grow until it bursts forth from our earthly tents into our dwellings from heaven, our glorified bodies. The nature of the seed is actually our celestial body. This is born from above and therefore cannot sin, for there is no sin in God. Paul wrote of this seed as **Christ formed in you** (Galatians 4.19). We have received the seed of God who is the Father of the seed and we are the mother of the seed. We have this seed called our inner man, and we are to nurture it under the leading of the spirit of God so that it grows until it is a complete man in Christ (Colossians 1.28). Sin may continue to operate in some measure in our bodies of death, for sin reigns in death. However, our lives are to grow in such a fashion that our inner man, the new man, the embryo of Christ in us, matures to the likeness of Christ so that sin no longer has sway in our lives. When unrighteousness or lawlessness does rear its ugly head we know that it is not coming from our inner man, the new **I**, but from sin that dwells in our bodies of death.

So, let us not make this matter of the salvation of the soul a heavy weight that we cannot carry, or to dwell on sin that dwells within our bodies of death, or to see this race as a great labor that wearies us. Let us rejoice that we have the seed of God within us and that this seed is growing into the glory of Christ, and one day, our hard seed coat, our bodies of death, will be broken and this treasure in earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4.7) will burst forth in glory. Hallelujah! We will be like our beloved Lord Jesus one day, for His seed is within us. We now have His genetic makeup and will be conformed to His very image.

Now, with this clarification, let us return to Paul and running the race.

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Seven qualities for running the race.

At the end of his life, Paul wrote two letters to Timothy, his beloved son in *the* faith. In his second letter, Paul encouraged Timothy in how to strive in running the race of *the* faith to win the prize. It is very interesting that Paul's last letter was to an individual, and we could say that the thoughts in this personal letter represented the heart of Paul at the end of his life in the body. It wasn't to leaders of an assembly or to men of reputation. It was to one timid young man who desired the Lord and who was willing to learn how to run the race from a dear brother who served as an example of the life of Christ. There was no exhortation to go out and get people saved; there was no emphasis on building "churches," on how to conduct meetings or to organize people, on how to increase "membership" rolls, on the need for church leadership or the five-fold ministry, nor on countless other things that we see emphasized today amongst the Lord's people in the institutional church.

The heart cry of Paul was that his beloved Timothy would follow his doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, and afflictions (2 Timothy 3.10-11 NKJ). However, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus, was quick to remind Timothy that the Lord delivered him out of all the trials (2 Timothy 1.1; 3.10-11). Timothy was not to look to any man, including the "striving" apostle, but to look to the One who would stand with him and deliver him, even into His kingdom.

Many had deserted this dear brother in Christ. All those in Asia had turned away from Paul (2 Timothy 1.15). Demas had forsaken him, having loved this present world. Alexander the coppersmith had done Paul much harm. He was most likely a believer who refused to stop making idols for the pagans because this was how he made money (Acts 19.33; 2 Timothy 4.14). In an earlier letter, Paul could count only four converted Jews as ones who continued with him as fellow workers for the kingdom of God (Colossians 4.8-11). When he had to appear before the Roman court, no one stood with Paul. He wrote to Timothy: "**All forsook me. May it not be charged against them**" (2 Timothy 4.16 NKJ). Outwardly, it seemed as if Paul was a failure in his ministry; but what man sees does not matter. What matters is whether Christ is in it or not. Paul's testimony at the very end was: **But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion's mouth** (2 Timothy 4.17 NASB). As Paul was striving to reach the goal for the prize, the Lord was with him. This was all that mattered, and it is all that matters to any of the Lord's servants. Is Jesus standing with you and strengthening you? If He is, you can be assured that when the battle rages He will deliver you, just as He did Paul.

Now, in the second chapter of his second letter to Timothy, Paul encouraged Timothy to run the race of *the* faith by describing seven different types of people who represent Christians who will go on to finish the course. Those with the

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qualities of a *son* strong in the grace (2.1), a *soldier of Jesus Christ* (2.3), an *athlete* (2.5), a *hard-working farmer* (2.6), an *approved workman* (2.15), a *vessel for honor* (2.21), and a *bondservant of the Lord* (2.24) will finish the course.

Someone once objected to me that Paul's words to Timothy were only for evangelists; therefore, the words do not apply to all Christians. Such thinking comes from one who places a higher value on the ones gifted to equip the saints for the work of service (Ephesians 4.11-12) than Scripture places on it. The ecclesia of our day is filled with men that exalt themselves above other brethren in Christ. However, we must see that as Paul was about to depart this life, he was leaving instruction to his beloved Timothy in how to run the race as he had run the race. It matters not if a person is called (given the responsibility by the Lord) as an evangelist, a pastor-teacher, or a bearer of a cold cup of water for a weary saint. We all are called to serve, and we all are called to run the race. Why? Because we all are given talents according to our ability, and we all are called to inherit the kingdom to rule with Christ (Matthew 25.14-30).

Given this view, it is instructive to look briefly at each example, recognizing that there is much more to the lessons taught by Paul than is covered in the following paragraphs.

A son strong in the grace.

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. (2 Timothy 2.1-2 NASB)

A son strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus is one who is running the race. Paul and Timothy were not related by blood; but Paul was like a spiritual father to Timothy, who looked to Paul as his example of one who was in Christ who was following his Master in the proper way. As Timothy watched Paul, he saw a man who knew the grace of God. It was Paul who wrote to the Corinthians: **But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me** (1 Corinthians 15.10 NASB). Paul labored not according to his own power but according to the enabling power of God, apart from human merit. This is one of the meanings of grace, and Paul was a walking example of this grace. When he was given a messenger of Satan so that he would not exalt himself, Paul heard his Lord say, **“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Paul's response to this grace was: Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me** (2 Corinthians 12.9 NASB).

It is very interesting that Paul concluded all of his epistles with a word of grace: *Grace be with you*. Paul saw that running the race of *the* faith is all by grace, for apart from the power of Christ no one will make it to the end.

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It is also significant that Paul wrote to Timothy as his son. We all are called to grow up to be sons placed in the kingdom. Sons strong in the grace are those who will reach the goal for the prize.

A soldier in the good fight of the faith.

No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. (2 Timothy 2.4 NASB)

By using the illustration of a soldier, Paul likened the race to a battle or a fight. Soldiers are ones who no longer are civilians but are enlisted in the service of a country under a military commander. They no longer do as they please but take all their orders from a higher command. Paul did not see the soldier on leave from duty but in active service, engaged in the duties of a soldier, ready to do all that his commander orders.

Those who are running the race of *the* faith are soldiers in active service, ready to please the Commander, our Lord Jesus. He is the One who has enlisted us. As a soldier of Christ, we are to be engaged in the spiritual battle that is raging and not to be entangled with the affairs of this world. A soldier cannot fight the battle and be entangled in world affairs. In other words, Christians can become so entangled in the world that they are overcome (conquered) by the world, which lies in the power of the evil one (1 John 5.19). This is why Paul exhorted the Ephesian believers to be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might, to put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. Why?

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual {forces} of wickedness in the heavenly {places}. (Ephesians 6.12 NASB)

There is a battle raging over Christians, and it is based in the heavenly places or among the celestials (cv). Satan, the prince of the power (authority) of the air, and his ruling angels are engaged in warfare to disqualify saints from ascending the throne. A soldier engaged in the battle and rightly protected fights the good fight to victory.

An athlete who competes according to the rules.

And also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. (2 Timothy 2.5 NASB)

As we have already seen, Paul was competing in such a way that he would not be disqualified from attaining to the *out*-resurrection and entering the Tabernacles Age as a conqueror in Christ. Paul exhorts us today that there is a way to run the

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race. We must do it by the rules. Just consider any contest; there are rules that are set by which all contestants must compete. If there were no rules, then the judges of the contest would have nothing by which to determine who wins. It is the same thing with the race in which we are engaged. There is a correct way to fight and to run so as to win. This is why Paul exhorted the brethren in Christ to put off and to put on (Romans 13.12-14; Ephesians 4.22-24; Colossians 3.8-10), to not sleep spiritually and to remain awake and sober spiritually (Romans 13.11; 1 Thessalonians 5.6-8), to flee and to pursue (1 Timothy 6.11; 2 Timothy 2.22) and to forget what lies behind and reach forward to what lies ahead (Philippians 3.13). Of course, this is only a sample of what the Scriptures teach us in this regard.

Paul wrote to the Philippians: **To write the same things {again} is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you** (Philippians 3.1 NASB). To this end, we must be reminded again of what Paul wrote to the believers in Rome. He wrote of one of the most important rules for winning.

So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (Romans 8.12-14 NASB)

We must walk according to the spirit. If we live according to the flesh, we will die—not an eternal death because all who are saved by grace through faith have immortal life as the gift of God. But there is a 1,000-year age set before us. The death Paul referred to is the loss of a Christian's life (soul) in the Kingdom Age. As reinforced several times, the Lord Jesus Himself warned His disciples of losing or forfeiting the soul (soul life, self-life) when He comes in the glory of His Father (Matthew 16.25-27). This is a warning to disciples (Christians), not to the lost.

A hard-working farmer.

The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. (2 Timothy 2.6-7 NASB)

Of the three types—a soldier, an athlete and a farmer—the farmer is the least recognized and the most hidden. A soldier is one who is seen on the front lines; an athlete competes before the masses; but the farmer labors all alone in the field from sunrise to sunset. A farmer works very hard to yield a crop. He must prepare the soil, plant the seed, water the ground, care for the plants once they begin to sprout, and protect the growing crop from predators (insects, animals). However, even his best efforts may fail to yield a suitable crop, for he is at the mercy of the weather. When a crop fails, the hard-working farmer doesn't give up; he merely starts over again when the next planting season comes. He presses on from one season to the next, and he reaps through much toil. When the crop does come in, the farmer takes a portion for his own use.

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Christians who are seeking the coming kingdom are to be like hard-working farmers, working to bear fruit to the glory of God (John 15.8). If we do, then we will share in the fruit of the coming kingdom. Like a farmer laboring long hours all alone with no crowd watching him or exalting him, we are to be quietly laboring, not drawing attention to our work or even expecting a reward for our diligence. As Paul wrote: **Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve** (Colossians 3.23-24 NASB). Our reward is the celestial kingdom, which also speaks of us receiving celestial, glorified bodies like our Lord's body. We are to be engaged in a season of bearing fruit that will last until we either fall asleep in Jesus.

Many think of the farmer as an exhortation and encouragement to preach the gospel of the grace of God to the lost. Surely we can see the farmer as a picture of the evangelist, but this is too narrow a view of what Paul wrote to Timothy. Truly God's heart is to visit the nations to take out of them a people for His name (Acts 15.14). However, God is just as concerned about maturing the saved as He is about saving the lost. In fact, if we take the twenty-six books of the New Testament, after the book of Acts, the Scriptures pertain entirely to the saved that they would come into full maturity, come into perfection, be complete in Christ (Ephesians 4.13; Philippians 3.12; Colossians 1.28); that they would have an abundant entrance into the kingdom (2 Peter 1.5-11). Although he sought to reach the nations, Paul nevertheless spent much more effort exhorting and encouraging the saved called out from among the nations (and a remnant of Jews) to press on toward the goal for the prize and to run the race of *the* faith. He was the hard-working farmer who sought to see those who had been planted in Christ grow up to be rooted and built up in Christ (Colossians 2.7); to be mature in Christ and not end as an aborted plant, that is, a Christian who falls away from *the* faith (1 Timothy 1.18-20; 5.11-14; 6.10; 2 Timothy 2.17-21; 4.3-4; Hebrews 6.7-8), or who never grows up beyond being a babe in Christ (1 Corinthians 3.1).

For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away {from it.} For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? (Hebrews 2.1-3 NASB)

Paul exhorted the saved to not neglect so great a salvation and to press on to full spiritual growth. This is the heart of the hard-working farmer who knows that his Father sees all that is done through His Son and will reward him in that day. **For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them** (Ephesians 2.10 NASB). The hard-working farmer is not doing his own work but those works that were created in Christ Jesus, which God prepared beforehand. All a farmer must do is walk in the good works of Christ. They are not his works but the works of Christ. The farmer merely is doing what his Lord is doing. **"If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall My servant**

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also be; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him" (John 12.26 NASB). The farmer is led by the Lord and does what the Lord is doing.

Oh, we seem to have it all backwards. So many Christians who have a good heart to serve the Lord, out of their zeal, go off and do things in the name of the Lord. But are they doing what the Lord is doing? This is what matters, for this is what the Father will honor. They must be His works, not our works. We merely are the unprofitable servants.

"So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'" (Luke 17.10 NKJ)

All of this pertains to running the race according to the rules, and the rules are very simple: be led by the spirit and do what the Lord is doing, do the works that come from Christ and, we could say, that are in Christ (Ephesians 2.10).

Finally, it is worth noting that rather than explain everything to Timothy, Paul did what everyone who is spiritual should do; he directed Timothy to the Head, to the Lord who gives understanding. This is what every pastor-teacher should do. It is Christ, through the word of God and the Holy Spirit, who will give understanding. Every child of God *must* be directed to the Lord Jesus Himself. Unfortunately, today, many men have taken the place of Christ in the lives of believers so that they seldom look to the One who has the answers. As Paul wrote to Timothy: **For there is one God, {and} one mediator also between God and men, {the} man Christ Jesus** (1 Timothy 2.5 NASB). Although Paul was Timothy's spiritual father, he never took the place of Christ in Timothy's life. This is as it should be for everyone who is teaching the brethren. As soon as a teacher begins to draw attention to himself, then he is moving onto very dangerous ground for himself and the brethren.

A diligent, approved workman.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2.15 NASB)

In Paul's day, many men were straying from the truth. They were saved; but they had moved from the truth of the word, which resulted in them upsetting the faith of others. Some men were saying that the resurrection had past already. Why would this upset the faith of some saints? Because the resurrection and the coming of the kingdom are bound together! If the resurrection had come, then so had the kingdom come; but where was the evidence of the reign of Christ in Paul's day? This type of teaching led only to confusion amongst those who had been taught the truth through brothers like Paul. To Paul, their message was like gangrene, something that spreads like cancer. We could even say it was like leaven, that once it began to grow, it corrupted the whole lump (1 Corinthians 5.6; Galatians 5.9). In light

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of this danger, Paul exhorted Timothy to rightly divide the word of truth. This is the type of worker who can present himself approved to God, for he will not be ashamed of the word that he has shared with others.

At the judgment seat of Christ, those who have taught others will incur a stricter judgment (James 3.1). There will be those who will shrink back in shame because they did not rightly divide the word, which led to others being led astray from the truth that would have prepared them for the 1,000-year reign of Christ. This is one of the most serious issues facing the Lord's people today. There is a preponderance of teaching today that, at best, could be described as "spiritual junk food," and at worst, is error.

Only those who are rightly dividing the word of truth will not be overcome with the leavened understanding of the kingdom. Why? Because they will know the truth that will lead them to run the race of *the* faith and will lead them to an abundant entrance into the kingdom!

However, we must be very clear that this word to rightly divide the word of God is for every Christian, not just for those who are called to teach from the word. It is the responsibility of every believer to read the word under the leadership of the spirit of God. How can we discern the truth if we are not studying the word on our own and verifying to our own satisfaction what others might teach us? Thank God for those He has called to teach His people, but we must realize that not all who teach today have been called by God to do so. Many say today that they are called of God; but a day will come when many will say "Lord, Lord, we have done this and done that in Your name," and He will say, "Depart from Me" (Matthew 7.22-23). There are tares planted amongst the wheat who will try to stop the good seed from growing and bearing fruit to the glory of God (Matthew 13.24-30). In this day of lawlessness, leaven, and lukewarmness, we need spiritual discernment; and we receive this through *the mature* knowledge (the strong meat) of the word of God and the spirit of God. Those who are running the race will be those who know the word of God and are walking in the spirit. This requires diligence on our part. In this way, we will be able to present ourselves approved to God.

The Hebrew believers were exhorted for not feeding on the strong meat of the word, which refers to the age to come (Hebrews 2.5). They should have been able to teach others about the kingdom, but they had neglected so great a salvation (Hebrews 2.3) and were in need of the milk of the word, as if they were babes in Christ (1 Corinthians 3.1-3).

Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But STRONG MEAT belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by

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reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Hebrews 5.11-14 KJV)

We desperately need the strong meat in order to discern both good and evil. Running the race requires spiritual discernment to run and win. We must not neglect the strong meat but grow in it!

A vessel for honor.

Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, “The Lord knows those who are His,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness.” Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these {things} he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. (2 Timothy 2.19-21 NASB)

There were men who were not rightly dividing the word, but these men were the Lord's. In regard to this, Paul reminded Timothy that the Lord knows those who are His. In other words, He knows of all that His people are doing, even if their acts are wicked. He is the One to whom we must give account (Hebrews 4.13). Therefore, if we call upon the name of the Lord, we must abstain from wickedness, for it will be judged. Those within the Lord's house who do not abstain from wickedness are vessels for dishonor. However, Paul's encouragement is that all who cleanse themselves from wickedness will be vessels for honor, prepared for every good work [in Christ (Ephesians 2.10)]. Vessels for honor will reign with Christ in His kingdom.

A bondservant of the Lord.

And the Lord's bondservant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses {and escape} from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (2 Timothy 2.24-26 NASB)

A bondservant is one who has given up his rights to follow the Master. He has denied himself, taken up his cross, and followed the Lord. A life laid down is a life of one who runs the race and is able to help others to run as well. If a bondservant holds to the word of the truth, there may be other Christians who might oppose the truth because they have been overcome by the things of the world and, often, have fallen into through what could be called “the systematizing of the deception” (Ephesians 4.14 cv). They need to change their minds about such things, and a true bondservant of Christ is to patiently reveal the mature (*epignosis*) knowledge to

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such a one. This is very similar to what James wrote: **My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins** (James 5.19-20 NASB).

Paul's testimony.

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul encouraged his beloved son in the faith: **Fight the good fight of faith** (1 Timothy 6.12). To Paul, the fight was a worthy fight; it was good because the reward for winning it was great. Paul never told anyone to do something that he himself was not doing. He was fighting the good fight as well, and as the end of his life in the body was drawing near, Paul testified of his successful campaign of pressing on toward the goal for the prize. He was the son, strong in the grace of the Lord; the seasoned soldier enlisted in the service of the Lord; the skilled athlete running in the race; the hard-working farmer, sowing and reaping; the approved workman, rightly dividing the word; the vessel for honor; and the bondservant of Jesus Christ, who was withstanding much opposition to the truth along the way.

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. (2 Timothy 4.6-8 NASB)

Like Enoch who received witness that he was pleasing to God (Hebrews 11.5), Paul knew that he had run the race of *the* faith. He had fought the good fight. He had finished the course. He had kept *the* faith until the end. He had endured the many trials and tribulations; and he knew that he had won the prize, the crown of righteousness, which means reigning with Christ as one of the many sons brought to glory.

There were three very specific things that Paul completed. The number *three* refers to divine perfection, and these three things sum up Paul's life.

First, there was *the* good fight. The word *fight* has the meaning of "a place of assembly as if one is led to it to enter a contest, to exert an effort." Paul saw himself having been taken into the arena to fight. He had been brought before the wild, ferocious beasts of the powers of darkness to engage in a battle to the death. It was as if Paul had no choice in the matter. However, it was not something bad to Paul; but rather, it was the *good* fight, which means it was valuable. Why was it valuable? Because it led Paul into the kingdom of his beloved Lord! Because he had run thus, not with uncertainty, he could declare: **The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His [celestial] heavenly kingdom; to Him {be} the glory forever and ever. Amen** (2 Timothy 4.18 NASB [CV]).

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Second, there was *the* course or *the* race. Paul finished the course that was set before him. The Lord Jesus had appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus, temporarily blinding his sight but forever changing his vision (Acts 9.3-19). Paul saw *the heavenly vision* and he was not disobedient to this vision (Acts 26.19). He saw the Christ in whom God will sum up all things (Ephesians 1.10) and who, one day, will deliver the kingdom to God the Father, when He has put an end to all rule and all authority and power, that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15.24-28). What a glorious day that will be for all of creation. The glory of God will fill the whole universe, for God will be fully satisfied.

Third, there was *the* faith. As we have seen, *the* faith refers to confidently holding fast to the hope of the coming King and His kingdom of glory. Through the many pressures and trials that he experienced, Paul never lost sight of the goal and never once doubted that his Lord would deliver him into His celestial kingdom. Oh, he must have wondered at times, but Paul never gave up *the* faith. He kept it to the end. He was like Caleb who saw the good of the land and believed all the promises of God: **“We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we shall surely overcome it”** (Numbers 13.30 NASB). Paul laid hold of that for which Christ had laid hold of him (Philippians 3.12).

Paul was a living example of one who denied himself and who was led by the spirit of God, even unto death. He was determined to be found worthy of the Lord, and the Lord had given him the assurance of his worthiness for the coming kingdom.

In the future, there is laid up for Paul a crown. In that day, the Judge will award Paul the crown—to rule with Christ among the celestials and on the earth. This crown is waiting not only for Paul but for all who love His appearing. They are the ones who will stand before the Judge unashamed (1 John 2.28) because they ran the race according to the rules and finished it by faith, holding to *the* faith, looking for and longing for the appearing of the glory of Christ (Titus 2.13) when He comes in the glory of His kingdom. They are the ones who love the Lord.

Let us love the Lord’s appearing. Let us follow Paul’s example and strive to run the race of *the* faith to win.

Let us run to win the race of *the* faith!

Scripture Abbreviations:

CV	Concordant Version (Literal New Testament)
KJV	King James Version of the Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NKJ	New King James Bible

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