

VIGIL



“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

~ I Peter 5:8

**Volume XXXVIII No. 1
January/February/March 2010
Spiritual Olympics**

RULES TO BE FOLLOWED Chance Hicks

The 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver have recently concluded. Those who watched the Olympics were able to see a variety of sporting events including skiing, snowboarding, curling, bobsledding, hockey, and many others. While all of these sports are different, they do have something in common; they are all governed by rules. There are rules which determine who can enter and participate in the sport, and there are rules which regulate how the sport can be played. When the rules of these sports are violated the player, or players, are penalized. The penalty could range from sitting in the penalty box in hockey to being disqualified from the competition as teams were for ejecting out of their bobsleds when they crashed. I have never seen the Olympics rulebook, but I can imagine that it is quite a compilation of rules!

The Hebrews writer speaks of the Christian life as a race, “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside

every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1). The apostle Paul also made this comparison when he wrote, “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain” (1 Corinthians 9:24). Are there rules for entering this Christian race? Are there rules, which govern the participants in the race? The answer to both of these questions is, “Yes!” Paul penned, “And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully” (2 Tim. 2:5).

The Rules of Entrance

First, consider the rules of entering the Christian race. Paul said a man can only be crowned if he strived lawfully. If an individual did not go through the entry process for the Olympics to qualify for a race but just walked onto the track and lined up, then that individual could not receive a gold medal even if he beat the competition with world record

setting time. He was not qualified to race because he had not lawfully entered into the race. Those who desire to enter into and run the Christian race must enter into it lawfully, that is according to the entrance commands of Christ.

The following words of Christ give the entrance commands: (1) Belief in Christ - “I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24); (2) Repentance of sins - “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3); (3) Confession of His Deity - “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 10:32); (4) Baptism into Christ - “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). Have you qualified yourself to participate in the Christian race as Christ commanded?

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EDITORIAL SPIRITUAL OLYMPICS

By Ronnie Hayes

To the church in Corinth Paul used an illustration concerning a race. Paul writes, "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. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air" (1 Corinthians 9:24-26). Were these the Olympic games? It is possible. Albert Barnes in his commentary on First Corinthians suggested that they were familiar with four games; "The Isthmian or Corinthian games, the Nemean games, the Pythian games, and the Olympic games" (169). Regardless of which game it was, he used an illustration the Corinthians understood. Paul took something familiar and used the familiarity to draw some powerful lessons. With the Winter Olympics just recently completed, we're taking this opportunity to do something similar. Let's look at Paul's illustration...

In the first place Paul spoke of **determination**. He used the phrase, "...So run, that ye may obtain" (1 Corinthians 9:24). How determined are we to do the will of God? These Olympians were focused. They live their life with one goal; to win gold! Is that the way we live? Do we have our minds on the goal? Do we "...seek ye first the kingdom of God..." (Matthew 6:33)? When discussing the faithfulness of some, the Hebrews writer warned "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is..." (Hebrews 10:25).

Apparently the "manner of some" was to forsake. How hard do we fight not to be in the same category? Are we determined to fight the good fight, finish the course and keep the faith (cf. 2 Timothy 4:7)? An old preacher once said, "I'm more determined today than I have ever been." What a wonderful attitude! Paul was determined and knew through Christ's help he could. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13). Unfortunately there are some who have their minds focused on things that will prevent them from obtaining their goal (cf. 1 John 2:15-17). As Christians we should never allow the physical to cost us the spiritual. May we fix our eyes on the goal and never allow anything to distract us.

Then Paul calls our attention to **discipline**. "...Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things..." (1 Corinthians 9:25). Regimented would be the best word to describe the life of an athlete. They recognize they can't have certain foods and can't participate in certain activities because it would hurt their training and possibly keep them from their goal. Christians must exercise self-control lest it cost them their soul. Paul warned, "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21). We live in a day when self-indulgence is the theme not self-control. If Christians listened to the world's philosophies today, they wouldn't have to abstain from anything! Even in the Church there are those who support social drinking, gambling, and view marriage very

differently than God does. How could this be? Discipline itself should teach us otherwise. Christians must control their lives according to the word of God. This is why Paul would state, "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" (1 Corinthians 9:27). I heard a wonderful illustration about Brother Gus Nichols. It is said that he refused to eat cold watermelon on a hot summer day just to prove that he was in control of his desires. As simple as that sounds it is a powerful example of discipline. We need to control our desires, not the reverse.

Last, Paul talks about **desire**. Paul could say, "...I therefore so run..." (1 Corinthians 9:26). No one can make you run. Paul said, "I" run. It was his personal choice. It was his desire. When one has the desire he will put forth the effort, time, and expense needed to accomplish the goal. What is our desire regarding the church, saving souls, and our way of living? Paul said, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Romans 10:1). The point is simple. The things we desire will be the things on which we will spend our money, use our time, and our talents. If our main goal in life is heaven, where do we spend our time?

Each time I saw an Olympian stand on the podium to receive their medal, I knew it wasn't an accident that they had received it. They had worked hard for their accomplishment. May we learn that as a Christian we have to work diligently to be pleasing to God. Remember that God "...is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). We all need to imitate Olympians in that fashion.

THE TRAINING TO BE PURSUED

Tom Larkin

Every four years the Olympic games bring together the world's best athletes. Some are known for their strength, others for amazing speed and agility, and still others for style and grace, but one principle is common in the training regimens of all of these athletes. That principle is steadfastness. One does not reach the Olympics by means of a casual, haphazard training program. These athletes appreciate the benefit of dedication and hard work.

The same is true in the Christian life. Challenges that Christians must face vary greatly, but all who remain faithful to God must be steadfast. The significance of this principle is highlighted in Hebrews 12:1-2 – “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

The word “patience” is defined by Thayer as “the characteristic of a man who is unswerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest of trial and suffering.” Perhaps like no other, Olympic athletes demonstrate the indispensable nature of steadfastness. Years of dedicated training are endured and unending preparation is made, often for events that last only seconds and the differences between winning and losing is often less than the blink of an eye.

This exhortation in Hebrews 12 recognizes the possibility of our steadfastness. We are reminded of others who ran the race with patience as “we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses.” These

are not witnesses in the sense of being a group of spectators, as if we run steadfastly because of the cheering crowd. Instead, a “witness” is one who can bear testimony to what he has seen. When Stephen was stoned, the “witnesses” laid their coats at Saul’s feet (Acts 7:58). The apostles were “witnesses” of the resurrected Christ (Act 2:32) having seen him alive following his crucifixion. Also translated “martyr,” this term refers to one willing to bear testimony to the point of death. Stephen (Acts 22:20) and Antipas (Revelation 2:13) were martyred because of their steadfastness to the faith of Christ.

The witnesses under consideration here are those stirring examples of faith in Hebrews 11 who bear witness to the fact that one can remain faithful in the midst of persecution and trying circumstances. That they persevered in their faithfulness to God is testimony to the fact that we also can be steadfast in our faith. These witnesses are not spectators of our lives – rather, we should be “mental spectators” of theirs as we reflect on the scripture’s account of their lives.

On May 6, 1954, Roger Bannister ran the first sub 4-minute mile breaking a record that had stood for eight years and which many thought would never be broken. Within months of his achievement, numerous others also broke the four-minute barrier, underscoring the fact that it was more of a psychological barrier than a physical one. Just as Bannister demonstrated the possibility of a sub four-minute mile, so these Old Testament witnesses prove that every Christian can be steadfast in the faith.

One step necessary to being steadfast is to “lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us.” Athletes may train with weights, but they lay them aside to compete. Equipment, such as bobsleds and

bicycles, has been developed using lighter materials, thus aiding the competitors to post faster times. Likewise, we must “lay aside” that which hinders us from running the Christian race with steadfastness. So that we can receive God’s word Peter instructs, “laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings” (1 Peter 2:1). James teaches, “Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21). And Paul exhorts us to “put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (Ephesians 4:22).

Encouraged by faithful witness and unencumbered by sinful practices, we then are prepared to run with patience. We must never underestimate the necessity of this quality. While not everyone will preach, or serve in a leadership role in the church, all must have patience. Steadfastness is an integral part of the Christian graces that we add to our faith so that we are neither barren nor unfruitful (2 Peter 1:5-8). Jesus said of the seed sown on good ground, “But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, have heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience” (Luke 8:15). Patience is developed when our faith is tested (James 1:3) and patience is the support upon which our hope rests (Romans 8:25). In order to receive the promises of God, we must have patience (Hebrews 10:36) and when patience is demonstrated in our lives, the result will be eternal life (Romans 2:7).

Steadfastness is essential to Olympic success, but it is only for worldly acclaim. We train steadfastly for eternal glory (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

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HURDLES TO OVERCOME

Billy Hayes

As the 2010 Olympic Games drew to a close in Vancouver, British Columbia, my family seemed to have adopted an air of disappointment. Due to our competitive nature, my wife and I almost became obsessed with the event of curling. However, we love everything about the events of the Summer Games. These are sports with which we grew up. Some of the most ancient events of the Olympiad are found in the games of the summer. The most ancient are the track and field events, especially the foot race. As an avid sportsaholic, the types of foot race hold no consequences to me; it is certainly about the challenge. Seemingly as a twist, someone somewhere decided to add the skills of jumping and running together. This event is called the 100 meters hurdle. The focus and skill of the athlete that prepares for this event, is only out shown by the horrific nature of the crash that will inevitably happen. As people, we all love a gripping race or event and the 100 meters hurdle is a grand example for life. As a matter of fact, God gives this exact example. "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, **let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.** Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds"(Hebrews 12:1-3, eph added bh).

Notice some of the hurdles in our life.

As we run the race of life one hurdle is self. Every person of sound

mind and age faces this hurdle. The hurdle of self is a big, big hurdle. This is the one from which most falls occur and also from which most Christians never recover. The hurdle of self has destroyed children of God from the very beginning. (Genesis 3; Exodus 20; 2 Timothy 4:10) Self can destroy my life, my worship, my relationships, and my salvation. As I run the race of a Christian's life, I must be cautious of this hurdle.

A second hurdle of the life of a child of God is love. However, this love is not sanctioned by God. It is the love of money. Paul, by inspiration, wrote the following: "**But they that will be rich** fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. **For the love of money is the root of all evil:** which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Timothy 6:9-10 eph. added bh). It is altogether shocking and appalling for what mankind is willing to sell God. For the majority, man will sell God for everything because [to this type of person] God holds absolutely no value. He is not the authority. He is not the Creator. He is only a crutch for the weakest minds. This love of money is so very tragic and will cost so many so much. As I live a Christian's life, I must be concerned about this hurdle.

A third hurdle of life for the child of God is a quenched torch. In colloquial usage, to be on fire for something is to have a strong desire for a thing. Many Christians are no longer on fire. They are simply holding quenched torches. Notice the following phrase; "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, **as the manner of some is;** but exhorting

one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25 emph. added bh). In other words, there were [and still are] some who adopted an attitude of apathy. The message of Jesus to the lackluster Laodiceans holds the same amount of truth today; halfway is horrible (of. Revelation 3:14-22). I have never heard of a newly born Christian to say, "Now back to life as usual." This is the point at which our zeal is usually the highest. Why do we lose that intensity? I am just as saved, as I was when I obeyed the gospel, if I live a faithful life. But seemingly, I have tripped over a hurdle in life. Don't just hold a quenched torch. As I live a Christian's life, I must be careful about this hurdle.

A fourth hurdle in the life of a Christian is time or the lack thereof. Every single person is given 168 hours every week. Some folks seemingly have more time. Why? One reason is called time management. As time is a gift from God, I must use it properly. That will ensure me as a faithful steward. Everyone will find the time to do the activities they really want to do. That is a very simple fact. However think of the example that is being set forth when I say I did not have the time to do this or that for the Kingdom of God or the spreading of the gospel. We have hid behind the excuse of fleeting time for far too long. As I live a Christian's life, I must be cautious about this hurdle.

The most obvious statement of this article is one that still must be stated. I cannot jump one single hurdle until I am in the race. Are you in the race?

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THE COMPETITION WE FACE

Tim Hayes

com-pe-ti-tion [kom-pi-tish-uh n] – noun the act of competing; rivalry for supremacy, a prize, etc.: the rivalry offered by a competitor.

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain (I Corinthians 9:24).

There are many differences from the sport of running to the race in which the child of God is involved: one is not in competition against others involved in the race; all that successfully complete the race win; the race is not the same length for all entered; all running the race face the same competition.

For all involved in the Christian race there is but one who competes against the Christian; there is but one whose desire is to defeat the child of God. The competition may be manifested in different manners but the source will always be the same. Satan is the opponent who always stands in opposition to the child of God and ultimately against God.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour (I Peter 5:8). Peter described Satan as the *adversary* of those who are running the Christian race. The desire of Satan is to keep the child of God from obtaining his goal; to defeat the child of God; to destroy the child of God.

The child of God must readily recognize his opponent. Satan will not appear as depicted in so many cartoons: red suit, pointed tail, horns on his head and a pitchfork. Christ warned of the false prophets who present themselves as faithful followers: *Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves* (Matthew 7:15). Those running the

Christian race must see their competition as his true self. Satan may present himself in things that in themselves are not sin: *He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful* (Matthew 13:22). Satan may manifest himself in the lives of those who once had faithfully run the race: *For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them* (Acts 20:29-30).

Satan is lost eternally therefore he will not be saved and cannot be saved. Jesus Christ did not die upon the cross of Calvary for the angels but only for mankind. Through Satan's sin he condemned himself to eternal damnation. *Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels* (Matthew 25:41). Satan has no hope of Heaven therefore he will not receive the crown of righteousness as described by Paul: *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.* (II Timothy 4:8).

The book of Job is a brilliant picture of the odious existence of Satan. Satan cannot have Heaven and does not want anyone else to enjoy eternal life. Satan will not obey God and does not desire any others to live an obedient life. Job had the misunderstanding that he was being reproved by God (Job 1:21) but it was

Satan who was tempting Job. *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man* (James 1:13).

Satan's ultimate objective is one that he can never accomplish and that is the defeat of God. *Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world* (I John 4:4). God's desire is for all to be saved while Satan's desire is for all to be lost. *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance* (II Peter 3:9). Jesus Christ gave His all while Satan only takes. *Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many* (Matthew 20:28).

Satan cannot defeat God and Satan cannot defeat those who run the Christian race in accordance with the word of God. The only way for Satan to be victorious is for one to give the race to him. Jesus said: *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand* (John 10:27-29).

May each child of God run the race that is set before him realizing the devious desires of the competition we face.

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TEMPERANCE IS A MUST

Patrick Morrison

Paul drew upon the imagery of the games to illustrate the necessity of temperance in our Christian lives: “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. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: 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” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). The word here translated as “temperate” comes from the Greek *egkrateuomai*, which literally means “to have strength over oneself.” Self-control is one of the defining characteristics of faithful child of God: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23). Take note of the fact that no right-thinking society would ever enact laws against those who were loving, joyous, peaceful, longsuffering, gentle, good, faithful, meek, and temperate. Yet, how many laws exist on the books today because men and women will not exercise self-control? As Christians, we are commanded to add this quality to our lives: “And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity” (2 Peter 1: 5-7).

The sad reality is that we live in the midst of a society saturated with every imaginable avenue by which to fulfill our fleshly, carnal desires. Marriages are broken without regard due to every sort of sexual perversion imaginable and with no compunction

to infidelity. Almost every form of media is sex-saturated, appealing to our hedonistic society. Many clothing manufacturers are doing all that they can to provide less clothing for more money, knowing that flesh-peddling appeals to our carnality, even to the point that they are targeting our young people with clothing that oozes promiscuity! Pornography is made so readily available in our society that it is quickly becoming one of our fastest growing addictions, even among those who profess godliness! Satan is doing everything possible to ensure that we give in to every fleshly desire. With temptations at every turn, if we truly desire to shine as lights in this world (Philippians 2:15), then we must resolve to be temperate in all things.

As Paul stood before Felix, he reasoned with him of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come (Acts 24:25). Peter reminded those of the household of Cornelius that “he that feareth him (God), and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:35). Faith that pleases the Lord will combine both aspects of godly living: righteousness and temperance. The way of the Lord asks more of us than simply right doing. Serving the Lord Jesus Christ also requires us to refrain from doing that which is ungodly and unrighteous. Herein is the exercise of self-control. Jesus commands us to give up certain things in order to follow him, and chief among those things we must give up is self (Luke 9:23). Too many desire a religion that is void of sacrifice. Being asked to give up something we may cherish is going too far. Many will leave the Judgment Day sorrowful, for while they were willing to do many great things for the Lord, they were not willing to give up what they cherished most in order to fully commit themselves to his cause (Matthew 19: 22). At the heart of our unwillingness to practice self-control is SELF.

Selfishness, an unwillingness to deny ourselves, is the root cause of our unhappiness and our sinfulness. Though it may be difficult, and it may cause us pain, temperance is absolutely necessary to run the Christian race. Paul states that he rigorously disciplined himself spiritually, lest after preaching to others he should be rejected (1 Corinthians 9:27). The word translated “keep under” in the King James Version is variously translated as “discipline,” “buffet,” or “chastise.” The imagery used by Paul in this context was that of an athlete competing in the games. During their training for, and participation in, the games, athletes would deny themselves certain pleasures that at other times they willingly indulged. If we are to maintain a proper focus on the goal of heaven, then we must refuse certain practices and behaviors in which others will freely engage. Temperance will separate the victors from those who have only a pretense of godliness (2 Timothy 3:5).

Temperance is sorely lacking in our world today. As children of God, may we show the way to heaven by a willingness to deny ourselves and to practice self-control. Not only does the world need our example, but we must also understand that our failure to do so will cause us to be lost. Paul wrote, “But if they cannot contain (the same word translated temperance in other passages, PM), let them marry: for it is better to let them marry than to burn” (1 Corinthians 7:9). If we fail to practice temperance, not only will we burn in our lusts for fleshly pleasures, we will ultimately burn eternally for our refusal to rein ourselves in! The prize of heaven awaits those who will run the race with temperance.

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THE GOLD MEDAL

Dale Hubbert

Steve Holcomb guided the USA-1 “Night Train” four man bobsled team to the end of the course on the final run in the 2010 Winter Olympics. As he neared the finish at incredible speeds the goal of a lifetime was about to become reality. He and his teammates were awarded the gold medal – the best in the world. Years of sacrifice and hard work culminated on a podium as he listened to the National Anthem of his native country the United States.

It is not unusual to see tears on that podium as scores of memories flood the mind of the participant. So many years of training whose rewards depended on the performance of a few seconds and upon the performance of other competitors upon whom they had no control. One glitch and all the hopes and dreams could be gone.

The gold medal is highly treasured and honored by both participants and spectators. It stands as the pinnacle of success in that athletic field. There are some thought provoking comparisons to those goals and the journey of God’s children.

The reward for which all those who trust in God is different. It is a crown of life. The words of James are comforting and challenging: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (James 1:12).

It is ironic that the reward of the faithful child of God is described as a crown – the same word used to describe the horrible and painful instrument used upon the head of Jesus at his crucifixion (Matthew 27:29). Crowns have a cost. Earthly crowns usually are very expensive. Our “gold medal” has a great cost as

well. It cost Jesus his life (Matthew 20:28) and will cost us a life of service and devotion (Luke 9:23).

The parallels between the Olympic gold medal and the spiritual crown of life are intriguing. Steve Holcomb and his bobsled team had to work together to reach the gold. While spiritual gold medals are given individually, it would be difficult to argue that teammates are not important along the way (1 Thessalonians 4:1).

Steve Holcomb had to take some incredible risks to earn his medal. He underwent a very serious, dangerous, and unproven surgery on his eye to enable him to have the vision to be successful in their aspiration. We must be willing to let God “operate” on our eyes though his written will so that we will clearly be able to see our goal.

The first epistle of Peter encouraged elders to be strong and faithful so that when the chief Shepherd comes they can receive a crown of glory that will not fade away (1 Peter 5:4). It is likely that many Olympic medals that have been won have been lost, stolen, or no longer mean what they once did to the winners or the spectators. The Christian’s “gold medal” will mean more with every passing moment.

Olympic gold medals are certainly a sign of great achievement and effort. It is worthy to honor and appreciate those who have made such sacrifices to succeed. There is a spiritual medal that is of even more value. Paul discussed in the Corinthian letter the understanding that earthly accomplishments like gold medals are “corruptible” but that we are striving for a crown that will last forever (1 Corinthians 9:25).

It is easy to see that Olympic gold medals can only go to one

person or team in each event (1 Corinthians 9:24). For one to win – all others must in a sense “lose”. The gold medal of the child of God is not that way. It was impressed upon Timothy by his mentor Paul that not only did Paul have a crown of righteousness in reserve but crowns were available to all who were faithful to the Lord (2 Timothy 4:8). Every person who will pay the price and walk the walk, can and will receive the spiritual gold medal.

We must be careful not to let anyone take our crown (Revelation 3:11). There are many barriers that would hinder us from the crown of life. As much as God wants to bestow crowns, Satan wants us to be hindered (1 Thessalonians 2:18). Our eyes must remain on the prize every day (Philippians 3:14). We must not grow weary during training and struggles (Galatians 6:9).

Steve Holcomb and his team had a common mission and a common purpose. They did not enter the figure skating, curling, or any of the other events. They were focused totally on bobsledding. If we are going to get the crown of life our focus above all other things must be upon serving the Lord (Colossians 3:24). We must not let a day go by without making plans for heaven.

Well over 99% of those who live on the earth will never receive an Olympic gold medal. The great majority of participants in the Olympics will not stand upon that highest platform. Every person can however be awarded the greatest medal of all – the crown of life if we will dedicate our life to God. Are you shooting for the gold?

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Rules to be Followed -- by Chance Hicks ----- continued from page 1

If you have not done these things, or if you have only done a portion of these requirements, then you are not qualified to obtain the prize at the end of the race! Just as an individual cannot win the Olympic medal without entering properly, so we cannot obtain the incorruptible crown in Heaven without entering into the race properly! Obey the instructions of Christ now so that you can be qualified to obtain the crown!

The Rules of Running

Second, consider the rules which govern running the Christian race. Notice again the words of the Hebrews writer, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run

with patience the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1). Notice that the author refers to "the race" before us. This is the race for the incorruptible crown of life in Heaven; there is only one race which run lawfully will result in that crown!

The Christian race is governed by the New Testament of Christ. It is not governed by the Law of Moses (Colossians 2:14; Galatians 3:24). The Ten Commandments do not govern the Christian race (Romans 7:4, 7). The doctrine of Christ is the system of rules that must be followed in order to obtain the prize. Jesus said His doctrine will be that by which our lives are judged, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the

same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). Just as the actions of the athletes in the Olympics are viewed and compared with the rulebook, so our actions will be viewed on the Day of Judgment and compared with the words of Christ. If our actions in life are in accordance with the teaching of Christ, then we will receive the crown. However, if our actions in life violate the teachings of Christ or neglect the teachings of Christ, then we will be disqualified from receiving the crown on the Day of Judgment.

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VIGIL is published under the oversight of the elders of the Adamsville Church of Christ, Ronnie Hayes, Editor, and Chance Hicks, Associate Editor. You may go to our website www.acoc.org to read and/or download archived issues of Vigil. If you would like to receive Vigil via email send us your request to: acofc@charterinternet.com .
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