

LIKE AN ATHLETE

“Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor’s crown unless he competes according to the rules.”

— 2 TIMOTHY 2:5

Timothy was converted to Christianity under the mentorship of Paul and, as a young man, was left to head the church Paul had founded in Ephesus. Paul knew him to be timid, insecure and often prone to illness. At times, he was even ashamed of the Gospel for the persecution it caused, but Paul was not thwarted by Timothy’s youth and frailties. Writing from a Roman prison, he instructs, supports and encourages him.

One of the things Paul says in his second letter to Timothy was that anyone competing as an athlete does not receive the victor’s crown unless he competes according to the rules. Two essential parallels can be drawn between an athlete and a disciple of Christ. An athlete doesn’t just kick a ball around for fun, but is disciplined, trained, focused and hardworking. An athlete competes according to the rules; otherwise there is no virtue in competing.

To be a disciple for Christ, we cannot live the Christian life any way we please, but must live it by the Word of God. Paul tells Timothy, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2). The gist here is that we don’t modify, adjust or change the Word of God in any way, but like an athlete, abide by the rules, preaching and teaching Scripture as it is given. The emphasis is not about winning, but

about competing, and to compete well, we need to draw on the indwelling Spirit of Christ as our enabler.

The second aspect is that an athlete doesn't compete against himself, but works in partnership with others. Hebrews 12:1 says, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." What the writer is saying is that many others are running the race, so we are surrounded by witnesses. An athlete cannot run the race alone, nor should a Christian be a lone ranger in their faith. We need to be surrounded by those we learn from and who will encourage and support us.

As Christians, we are all a part of the body of Christ and meant to work in dependence upon God and one another. Like an athlete, we run the race God has set for us, drawing upon the internal presence of Christ and external disciplines of being a worker together with Him.

PRAYER: Dear Father, grant me the strength, discipline and perseverance to run the race You have set for me. Help me to be a strong disciple for You. Thank You, Lord.

TO REFLECT UPON: Am I running the race God has set for me and drawing on His indwelling Spirit?