

## Doctrine of the Athletic Metaphor

### 1. Introduction

1.1 In 2Ti 2:1-6, Paul uses four metaphors to teach the necessity of a disciplined approach to successfully living the Christian life.

KJV

2Ti 2:1 Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

2Ti 2:2 And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able **to teach** others also.

2Ti 2:3 Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good **soldier** of Jesus Christ.

2Ti 2:4 No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

2Ti 2:5 And if a man also **strive for masteries**, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.

2Ti 2:6 The **husbandman** that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits.

1.2 The four metaphors are an academic, a soldier, an athlete and a farmer.

NIV

2Ti 2:1 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

2Ti 2:2 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.

2Ti 2:3 Endure hardship with us like a good **soldier** of Christ Jesus.

2Ti 2:4 No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs -- he wants to please his commanding officer.

2Ti 2:5 Similarly, if anyone competes as an **athlete**, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules.

2Ti 2:6 The hardworking **farmer** should be the first to receive a share of the crops.

1.3 The primary application in Second Timothy is to the pastor-teacher, but there is secondary application for the lay-person.

1.4 Physical exercise is said to be of value in 1Ti 4:8, but godliness, a product of spiritual exercise, is said to be of greater value.

1Ti 4:8 For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

1.4.1 Some have concluded in error that this verse teaches that physical exercise is of no value. Such clearly denies not only the literal reading of the verse but also there are metaphors found elsewhere in the Scripture that establish the value of exercise. These Scriptures will be covered later in this doctrine.

## 2. Background

2.1 The rules for competing in the ancient games were far more stringent than what we know today.

2.2. The most important of the games, at the time of Paul's writing, were the Isthmus Games.

2.3 They were held in Corinth every other year beginning c. 581 B.C.

2.4 The events were as follows:

DROMOS-the running events

PALE-the wrestling events

PUGME-the boxing events

PAGKRATION-a combination of boxing and wrestling

PENTATHOLON-a series of five events

HARMATON-the chariot-racing events

## 3. *The Athletic Metaphor*

3.1 To enter the games you had to be a citizen of Rome. Likewise, unbelievers cannot grow spiritually without being a citizen of heaven.

3.2 A competitor had to live for ten months in the gymnasium. A believer, likewise, must separate to a life of confession and consistent study of the Word. Certainly included in this analogy is a believer learning in a local church as a student.

3.3 A competitor had to answer all trumpet calls, of which there were three: one for meals, one for practice under the scrutiny of a coach and one for a classroom session.

3.4 The competitor had to exercise in all types of weather. A believer must also remain stable even under pressure. He must worship when it is convenient or when it is inconvenient.

3.5 A competitor could not be involved with members of the opposite sex; there could be no distractions. A believer must not be distracted by the many and varied temptations of the devil's world.

3.6 A competitor had to adhere to strict dietary rules. A believer must also be very restrictive and selective in terms of what he or she permits inside the mind. We are what we think--what we mentally ingest determines what we are.

3.7 The competitor had to submit to the authority of his respective coach. Each believer must find and submit to his pastor-teacher's authority.

3.8 Every competitor trained for game day. Every believer enters the local church on the first day of the week in order to perform in the six succeeding game days--the other six days of the week.

3.9 Paul, in writing to the church at Corinth, uses two athletic metaphors to declare his motivation for performing his duties--the acquisition of a heavenly reward. The two metaphors are running and boxing.

1Co 9:25 Everyone **who competes in the games goes into strict training**. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

1Co 9:26 Therefore I do not run like a man **running** aimlessly; I do **not fight like a man beating the air**.

1Co 9:27 No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

3.10 We find Paul using the athletic metaphor in three other places.

Gal 5:7 You were **running a good race**. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?

Col 2:18 Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels **disqualify you for the prize**. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions.

Phi 3:14 I **press on toward the goal** to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

3.11 Winners at the games received rewards. The rewards were called **Stephanoi**, translated in the KJV "crowns." Each crown carried with it significant material gains and acclaim.

3.11.1 The material gains were a large monetary stipend, a large landed estate, freedom from taxation and the acclaim centered around a ticker-tape parade and a bust of the winners likeness prominently displayed in the center of his hometown. A judge awarded the crowns from a **Bema**--a judgment seat.

3.11.2 Church Age believers will also be rewarded just after the Rapture for divine good. At the judgment seat of Christ, or the **Bema** (as it is called in the Greek), crowns will be awarded.

- The **Bema** was a place where a king, judge or procurator might sit to adjudicate a matter or reward an outstanding athlete or military hero. It is from the **Bema** that the judge would issue punishments or rewards.
- With reference to the subject of crowns, the judgment seat of Christ relates to rewards.
- It was at the **Bema**, during the Isthmus Games, that a winning contestant received his special reward called a **Stephanos**.
- It is to this analogy the New Testament speaks when it describes Church Age believers appearing before the judgment seat of Christ. Rom 14:10; 1Co 3:11-15 and 2Co 5:10

Rom 14:10 But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

2Co 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

1Co 3:11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1Co 3:12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

1Co 3:13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

1Co 3:14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

1Co 3:15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

4. In closing, the question we must ask ourselves: are we exercising spiritually, or are we spiritual couch potatoes?

