

STRIVING FOR THE GOLD

From July 14th to the 30th, the attention of the world will be focused on Los Angeles, California for the 2028 Summer Olympics, officially known as the Games of the XXXIV Olympiad.

The first Olympiad was supposedly held in 776 BC by the Greeks in the city of Olympia as a tribute to their god Zeus. Held in 4-year intervals, the Olympiad initially consisted of a single event: a foot race of 190 meters (approximately 208 yards).

The Los Angeles Olympics will feature over 10,000 athletes from 206 nations who will be competing in 351 events (165 men's events, 161 women's events and 25 mixed events) in 31 sports.

It has also become a huge mass media event. There will be 24,000 - 26,000 accredited media representatives from all over the world. American media giant NBC paid \$7.75 billion to bring the Games into your living rooms.

The apostle Paul used a similar athletic competition (the Isthmian Games in Corinth) to teach the Corinthian Christians many invaluable lessons. We, too, can benefit from Paul's teaching and insight in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.

25 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.

26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.

27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. (NKJV)

We realize the tremendous sacrifice required of an Olympic athlete — whether sprinter, long distance marathoner, boxer or wrestler. These athletes put in long, grinding, arduous and agonizing hours of daily training, under the most strenuous and grueling conditions.

Paul is using the rigorous training of the athletes to tell us to be exceedingly diligent in our spiritual conditioning. The training of our spiritual lives requires drawing and staying close to God through daily prayer, regular Bible study, heartfelt meditation and frequent fasting.

By our dedication and steadfast commitment, we show that we are prepared to contend earnestly for the truth He called us to.

The Olympic athletes compete for the gold medal. It is their goal to achieve the pinnacle of excellence in their chosen event. Moreover, in these modern Olympics, the gold medal translates not only into fame and glory but also into lucrative product endorsements for the victorious.

Paul emphasizes, in verse 25, the prize we seek is not a wreath on our heads or a gold medal about our necks. Our trophy is not a meal ticket for life or the promise of financial security. We labor for the imperishable crown of eternal life!

In 1 Peter 5:4, Peter says we will receive "the crown of glory that does not fade away." With the help of God's Holy Spirit in us, we run the race of life — facing major adversities — and win.

Before participating in the Games, athletes vowed to abide by the rules and not to cheat to win the medal.

In 2 Timothy 2:5, Paul says "And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules."

We have all heard and read the sad news about previous Olympic winners who were disqualified, their gold medals stripped, their future participation prohibited because they violated the rules.

As God's People, we must abide by and follow the rules, if we want to attain the victory and receive the prize. God sets the rules, and they are enumerated in His 10 Commandments. And we are reminded of our responsibility, our baptismal commitment "to live by every word of God" (Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4).

If we desire the prize of eternal life, we must remember Christ's admonition to the young man "But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." (Matthew 19:17)

As he awaited his execution in a Roman prison, Paul recalled the Isthmian Games he witnessed in Corinth and wrote this to Timothy: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing." (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

As he neared the end of his life, Paul realized he was nearing the finish line. He knew he was going to die a winner! He was going to cross the finish line and receive the victor's prize — the immortal crown and rulership at the return of Jesus Christ!

For true Christians, the Olympic Games in California are not merely a major athletic event that will grab our attention for several weeks.

It should serve as a call to action for all of God's people "to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:14, KJV)

That prize is the ultimate victory: the glorious reward of eternal life in the Kingdom of God!