

## Athletic Metaphors

Since conveyance of the first paragraph is the required condition for release of the second paragraph, then the latter also remain on deposit in heaven following the presentation of the Nike Awards.

The loser-believer will be able to visit the historical records section of the heavenly temple and view on file a listing of those blessings which he failed to receive but which were imputed to him in escrow in eternity past.

On the other hand, winners receive their investiture into a new order of chivalry, an elite corps of royal aristocrats possessing great power, authority, and privilege. This is the heritage of the privileged class.

Utilization of one's portfolio enables the believer to make the advance to spiritual maturity, execute the Christian way of life, and qualify for the conveyance of escrow blessings in time and eternity.

The New Testament is replete with passages which document these principles.

We have noted in our 2 Timothy passage the proper orientation for the advance—inculcation of doctrine into the cache of the soul's stream of consciousness:

**Hebrews 5:14** - Solid food [advanced doctrine] is for mature believers, who by constant use [facilitation] have trained themselves [gymnazo: Lit.: to exercise naked; refers to genuine humility] to distinguish good from evil [wheel-tracks of righteousness from wheel-tracks of wickedness].

Proper motivation is occupation with Christ and results in the believer achieving the objective.

**Acts 20:24** - I (Paul) consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the ministry the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the Gospel of God's grace.

Paul often uses the foot-race metaphor as an example of the believer's advance towards the goal of spiritual maturity.

**Philippians 3:12** - Not that I have already attained all this, or have already been made mature, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me [experiential sanctification].

**Philippians 3:13** - Fellow believers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it [spiritual maturity]. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind [past failures] and stretching forward to what is ahead [the rest of the race],

**Philippians 3:14** - I press on towards the goal [Santa Fé] to win the prize [escrow blessings in time] for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

The race-goal-prize metaphor used by Paul comes from the four Grecian games which occurred at certain intervals of what was referred to as an Olympiad. One of the four Grecian games was the Olympics, first held in 776 B.C. at Olympia, Greece. These games were performed every four years and were played in conjunction with the summer solstice, which marked the beginning of the Athenian new year.

In the third century B.C., Greek astronomer Eratosthenes of Cyrene developed a system of dating tied to this four-year Olympiad. Within this Olympiad, four national games were conducted:

- a. Isthmian (IS-me-an) Games: Held in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years of each Olympiad in honor of Poseidon. Winners received a crown of dry wild celery. Later when the Romans got involved it was changed to a crown of pine branches. These games were played at Corinth.
- b. Nemeian (Ne-ME-an) Games: Also held in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years of the Olympiad, they were played in honor of Zeus. Winners were awarded a crown of fresh wild celery. These games were held at Argos.
- c. Pythian Games: Held in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the Olympiad in honor of Apollo. Winners were awarded a laurel crown. These games were played at Mt. Parnassus near Delphi.
- d. Olympic Games: Held in the 1<sup>st</sup> year of each Olympiad in honor of Zeus. Winners were presented a crown of wild olive leaves. These games were performed at Olympia.

In Paul's athletic metaphor, the track events of these national games are the "race" and represents the Christian's spiritual growth. In our study's metaphor, the Santa Fé Trail symbolizes spiritual growth.

The "goal" is the square pillar at the end of the stadium marking the finish line and represents spiritual maturity. Arrival in Santa Fé is our example of entering into experiential sanctification.

Paul's "prize" refers to the victor's crown and illustrates escrow blessings in time and eternity. Our metaphor uses the profits earned from selling one's merchandise in the markets of Santa Fé to represent these escrow blessings.

Paul uses the athletic metaphor in several other passages of Scripture:

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

The rules are that you must train in the gymnasium and you must compete in the stadium. The gymnasium represents the training and discipline of learning the game plan in the academic environment of the local church. The stadium represents God's perfect plan for the believer inside the divine power system.

God has decreed every circumstance, or contest, the believer will face in time and He expects that believer to apply doctrine to the challenges presented.

The only approved environment for both the inculcation of doctrine and its application to life is the divine power system. To live life outside the system is to play outside the rules and therefore losing your chance for the prize.

John clearly outlines the boundaries of the Christian's playing field for the games of the Angelic Conflict.

**2 John 9** - No one has fellowship with God who keeps on going too far [out of bounds] and does not remain [on the field of play] through the doctrine of Christ. He who remains [on the field of play] by means of doctrine, this same one keeps on having fellowship with both the Father and the Son.

The entire process of preparing for the games, its competition, and the prospect of victory is all summarized by Paul in:

**1 Corinthians 9:24** - Do you not know that in a race, all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize [be a winner].

**1 Corinthians 9:25** - Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a corruptible crown [celery, pine, laurel, or olive]; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

Other passages mention crowns as an athletic metaphor for escrow blessings.

**2 Timothy 4:7** - I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

**2 Timothy 4:8** - Now there is in store 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 longed for His appearance.

**James 1:12** - Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial [momentum testing], because when he has stood the test, he will receive the victor's crown, the life God has promised to those who love Him.

These crowns constitute the prize won for the believer who reaches spiritual maturity. John evaluates the rewards for eternity in Revelation 2–3 by using metaphors associated with the accouterments of peerage associated with a royal family.

Paul distinguishes the difference between human good and divine good production and the end result of each in:

**1 Corinthians 3:12** - Now if any man builds upon the foundation [faith alone in Christ alone] with gold, silver, precious stones—wood, hay, stubble,

**1 Corinthians 3:13** - each man's production will become evident, for the day [Judgment Seat of Christ] will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; for the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.

**1 Corinthians 3:14** - If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward [7 Nike Awards in 13 paragraphs]. Jesus Christ is revealed as the cache in which the treasures of doctrine are deposited.

**Colossians 2:3** - In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.