



January 29, 2018

Anyone who has ever competed in a competition, such as running in a race, knows that striving for the winner's circle includes much effort, endurance, and discipline of mind and body. Are there temptations along the way to give up? Could we feel tired, uncomfortable, or even weak? Sure, but we remind ourselves of the joy available at the winner's circle because we did not quit and we stayed in the race until we crossed the finish line. Well, in the competition of life, what motivates us to stay on course, to keep walking according to God's Word, to keep choosing the rightly divided Word as our standard for living each day? Our greatest motivation to keep running the race day after day is the hope of Christ's return.

*I Corinthians 9:24:*

*Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.*

We run that we may obtain. We choose to discipline our lives to live according to God's Word so that we can compete and win the prize. We have an adversary who does not want us to receive all the blessings God has for us. That is the competition. So we put the work in to keep our lives on track according to the promises of God.

*Philippians 3:13,14:*

*Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,  
I press toward the mark [finish line] for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

Paul had not apprehended; his course was not yet finished because Christ had not returned. But he had the Hope burning in his heart to motivate him onward. Like the runner in the competition, he pressed toward the finish line, not looking behind. He was determined to succeed. He continued moving forward, knowing of the rewards

available for his faithful stand on God’s Word. He chose to forget those things behind him and to reach for those things ahead as he pressed toward the finish line.

At the finish line is the judgment seat of Christ. The words “judgment seat” are one Greek word, *bēma*, meaning a raised platform where the athletes would receive recognition for their achievements at the Olympics.

*II Corinthians 5:10:*

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat [bēma] 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.*

When used regarding Christ’s return, the judgment seat is a place where the believers stand to receive rewards and praise of God for “the things *done*.” It is not for judgment or condemnation. We have already been judged righteous in the person of our substitute and mediator, Christ Jesus. Those works done contrary to God’s Word will be burned (I Corinthians 3:13-15). The *bēma* is for prizes and rewards only. We appear before the *bēma* of Christ to have praise of God!

*I Corinthians 9:25:*

*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.*

“Striveth for the mastery” in the Greek means “to be a competitor in a contest,” to exert oneself, strive very earnestly. “Is temperate” means “to be self-controlled.” Like the athlete that prepares for the contest, we give our all by working God’s Word and living it. It takes discipline and self-control.

Crowns are given as rewards for Christians who choose to walk according to God’s Word. In the Olympics in the first century the crown was the highest reward for achievement in the athletic contest. That crown was a chaplet of leaves, so it was corruptible. The incorruptible crown refers to our spiritual rewards. We have the opportunity to receive incorruptible crowns—crowns that retain their glory forever (I Peter 1:3-5).

*II Timothy 4:8:*

*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.*

The love of God is to keep His commandments. There are crowns available for doing that. There are five crowns listed in the Bible for the believer to obtain: the crown incorruptible (I Corinthians 9:25), the crown of life (James 1:12), the crown of rejoicing (I Thessalonians 2:19), the crown of glory (I Peter 5:4), and the crown of righteousness (II Timothy 4:8).

In the new birth, we have already won the victory over death through our Lord Jesus Christ. Now as spiritual athletes in this competition of life, we can run the race and finish the course by disciplining our lives according to God's Word and being steadfast in the work of the Lord.

*I Corinthians 15:57,58:*

*But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*

As born-again believers, we did not confess Jesus as lord to just start the race. We faithfully serve our Lord to finish the race and receive the prize at the *bēma*. The hope of Christ's return provides motivation to serve our heavenly Father faithfully with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. Let's run to win and receive the crowns to have praise of God at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

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