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Did you ever play a sport as a kid? Perhaps you just enjoy watching sports. I particularly enjoy watching the sport of figure skating. Whether skating alone or with a partner, figure skaters display incredible athleticism and precision in their movements. They discipline their minds and strengthen and train their bodies to glide smoothly across the ice and propel themselves into the air to perform dazzling, high-speed twists and spins. These athletes prepare themselves for physical competition so that they can win.

As born-again believers in the Grace Administration (which began on the day of Pentecost), we are spiritual athletes. By studying the Greek from which the New Testament was translated, we will see the athletic terminology that God used to describe how we can walk as His children. Let's begin in I Corinthians.

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.

At the time the Apostle Paul received this revelation, the Olympic games were very popular with the Greeks. The Greek terminology referring to these contests would have provided a vivid illustration for the believers at that time and helps us understand our walk as spiritual athletes now. The first word that stands out to us is “run,” which is translated from the Greek word *trechō*. This word literally means to run, but metaphorically it indicates exerting oneself, to strive hard, or to spend one's strength in performing or attaining something. In verse 24, it refers to running in a race, *stadion*, a racecourse or a place in which running contests were held. Many of the larger Greek cities had courses like this that were 600 Greek feet (about 202 yards/185 meters) long.

Just like the running contests we can observe today, someone would emerge as the fastest and win the prize, *brabeion*. This prize was the award given to the victor in the games. Metaphorically, this word refers to a heavenly reward, and believers in the Grace Administration are instructed to “run, that ye may obtain.” Obtain means to lay hold of, so as to make one’s own. We are being encouraged to live for God, to exert ourselves, with the goal of obtaining heavenly rewards. We can see some of this terminology used in the Book of Philippians.

Philippians 2:16:

Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.

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 for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

Again, we see the word “run,” *trechō*, in chapter 2, verse 16. The Apostle Paul exerted himself and compared his service and his life for God to running in a race. “Apprehended” in verse 13 of Philippians 3 is translated from the same Greek word as “obtain” in I Corinthians 9:24. Paul did not consider himself to have won yet, so he continued to run, pressing toward the finish line for the prize, *brabeion*, the heavenly reward.

We can see more of this athletic terminology used in I Corinthians 9:25, which says, “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.” The words “striveth for the mastery” are translated from one Greek word, *agōnizomai*. Simply put, this means to contend in the games. The words “is temperate” are translated from *enkrateuomai* and mean to exercise power or mastery over; hence to exercise self-control. This word was used in reference to athletes who were preparing to compete in the games. Part of their physical preparations required exercising self-control to abstain from certain indulgences like unwholesome food and wine.

These athletes prepared themselves to compete for a “corruptible crown.” *Stephanos* is the Greek word translated “crown,” and it refers to the wreath or garland which was given as a prize to victors in the public games. This crown would eventually dry up and wither away, but as born-again believers, we are contending and disciplining ourselves so that we can obtain an “incorruptible crown,” a heavenly reward.

We have seen some of the Greek athletic terminology that God used to describe our walk as His children. Just like the athletes who competed in the Greek games or the figure skaters of today who train and compete physically, we choose to compete spiritually as God's children. We train ourselves to exercise self-control mentally and physically, focusing our actions on those things that help us to obtain heavenly rewards. We press toward the finish line, striving to win in the spiritual competition. We are spiritual athletes for God.

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