

## **The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians**

### **Run to Win the Race**

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

#### **1. The Runner's Objective (vs.24-25)**

The athletic competition which is the cultural connection for Paul's illustration were the Isthmian games which were held every two years in Corinth. These games were second only to the Olympian games, but they were centrally important in the social and religious spheres of life. Paul's primary objective in this section is to illustrate his own single-minded focus in living the Christian life (cf. Phil. 3:14). This attitude is directly applicable to every area of life including preaching the gospel in evangelism (cf. vs.19-23) and the use of his freedom in Christ (1 Cor. 8:13). The athletes competed in the Isthmian games in order to win and receive the prize of victory, and Christians are to live with the same kind of action and attitude (2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 5:4).

#### **2. The Runner's Training (vs.25-27a)**

Contestants in the Isthmian Games had a rigorous training regiment which included the requirement to prove a minimum of 10 months of dedicated preparation. This training included everything from exercise to diet, and it was all designed at preparing the athlete to perform at the highest level possible in the games. This training required dedicated self-control in resisting the natural desires of the body (cf. 1 Cor. 7:5) and would have been especially necessary in times of emotional distress (cf. Gen. 43:31). In hope of winning the race, the athlete must have total control over his body and not let it be master over him (cf. Gal. 5:17).

#### **3. The Runner's Eligibility (v.27b)**

One of the easiest ways to be disqualified from the Isthmian games was to not train according to the rules. The example of Israel's failure during the time of the Exodus, both as individuals and as a nation, is a warning of the danger of being disqualified to receive the desired prize (1 Cor. 10:11). The fact that Moses did not enter into the promised land (Num. 20:8-13; Deut. 1:37; 32:48-52) and that Paul had a healthy fear of missing out on some reward ought to make every professing Christian be sober-minded about the reality of being disqualified of receiving a reward (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10-15) or even of receiving eternal life (cf. Matt 7:21-23).