

Doctrine of the Athletic Metaphor

1. Introduction:

1.1 In 2Ti 2:1-6, there are four metaphors used to teach the necessity of a disciplined approach to successfully living the Christian life.

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2Ti 2:1 Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

2Ti 2:2 And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able **to teach** others also.

2Ti 2:3 Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good **soldier** of Jesus Christ.

2Ti 2:4 No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

2Ti 2:5 And if a man also **strive for masteries**, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.

2Ti 2:6 The **husbandman** that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits.

1.2 The primary application in Second Timothy is to the Pastor-Teacher but there is the secondary application for the laity and in 1Co 9:25-27 there is direct application to both the Pastor and the ordinary believer.

1.3 Each application teaches the mandate to grow by means of learning the Word of God.

1.4 Timothy needed a special letter to remind him of his responsibility.

1.5 There are in 2Ti 2:1-6 four analogies used to teach: an academic, a soldier, an athlete and a farmer.

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2Ti 2:1 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

2Ti 2:2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to **teach** others.

2Ti 2:3 Endure hardship with us like a good **soldier** of Christ Jesus.

2Ti 2:4 No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs -- he wants to please his commanding officer.

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

2Ti 2:6 The hardworking **farmer** should be the first to receive a share of the crops.

2. Our subject is "the athletic metaphor."

2.1 The most important of the games held at the time of Paul's writings were the Isthmus Games.

2.2 They were held in Corinth every other year beginning in about 581 BC.

3. The events were:

3.1 DROMOS - the running events,

3.2 PALE - the wrestling events,

3.3 PUGME - the boxing events,

3.4 PAGKRATION - these were a combination of boxing and wrestling,

3.5 PENTATHOLON - a series of five events and

3.6 HARMATON - the chariot racing events.

4. To enter the Games you had to be a citizen of Rome.

4.1 Likewise unbelievers cannot grow spiritually without a citizenship in heaven which comes from regeneration after faith in Christ as Savior.

5. A competitor in the games had to live for ten months in the gymnasium.

5.1 Likewise a believer must separate to a life of confession and consistent study of the Scriptures.

5.2 Certainly included in this analogy would be the entering into the local church as a student.

6. A competitor had to answer all trumpet calls of which there were three, one for meals, one for the athletic call, and one for a classroom call.

6.1 A believer must also show up when Bible Doctrine is taught.

6.2 The competitor had to exercise in all types of weather.

6.3 A believer must also remain stable even under pressure.

6.4 He/she must worship when it is convenient and when it is not convenient.

7. A competitor could not be involved with members of the opposite sex, there could be no distractions.

7.1 A believer cannot be distracted by the many and varied temptations of the devil's world.

8. A competitor had to adhere to strict dietary rules.

8.1 A believer must also be very restrictive and selective in terms of what he or she permits inside the mind. You are what you think and you think what you mentally ingest.

8.2 The competitor had to submit to the authority of the ranking general in charge of the gymnasium.

8.3 Each believer must find and submit to his/her Pastor-Teacher.

8.4 The games were always held in the gymnasium or stadium.

8.5 The believer operates in the world even though he/she should live according to standards found in the Word of God.

9. Every competitor trained for game day.

9.1 Every believer enters the local church on the first day of the week in order to learn the Word so as to perform in six succeeding game days, i.e. the other six days of the week.

10. Winners all receive rewards just as believers who are winners receive rewards both for time and eternity.

11. The rewards were called Crowns which in the Greek were **Stephanoi** or wreaths which carried significant material gain and acclaim; the gains and acclaims were: a large monetary stipend, a large landed estate, freedom from taxation, a ticker tape parade and a bust of his likeness prominently displayed in the center of his home town.

11.1 The Three Crowns:

11.1.1 The Crown of Righteousness - Available to the ordinary believer who reaches a spiritual maturity level deemed special by God.

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

2Ti 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 appearing.

11.1.2 Col. R. B. Thieme says of this crown "it would seem to be available to those who have acquired enough doctrine to appreciate and anticipate the rapture of the Church and the blessed events following."

11.2 The Crown of Life is available to all believers who not only reach maturity but are able to hold that level even amidst pressures.

Rev 2:10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

11.2.1 There are those who see this crown as available to only believers of the

Tribulation given the severity of the suffering listed.

11.2.2 This however flies in the face of the fact that in every age believers are deluged with pressure and testing from old Satan. Such pressure and testing being that which is permitted under the "permissive will of God."

11.2.3 Its appropriateness for other believers in all ages would seem to be strengthened by the fact that James mentions The Crown of Life.

Jam 1:12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

11.3 The Crown of Glory would seem to be available only to the Pastor who is faithful to the task of studying and teaching when it is convenient and when it is not convenient.

1Pe 5:2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve;

1Pe 5:3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

1Pe 5:4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

11.4 Fittingly in our new natures we are seen in heaven casting our crowns at the feet of Christ. Rev 4:10-11

Rev 4:10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives forever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

Rev 4:11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

12. Since crowns will be awarded Church Age Saints at the Bema, a point or two about the Bema is in order:

CHART THE BEMA

12.1 The Judgment Seat of Christ in the Greek is "the Bema."

12.2 It occurs at the rapture or immediately thereafter.

12.3 Only Church Age believers will appear at the Bema.

12.4 Works are judged at the Bema.

12.5 Human good is burned at the Bema.

12.6 Divine Good is rewarded.

12.7 Jesus Christ is the judge.

12.8 The Judgment Seat of Christ is mentioned in 2Co 5:10, 1Co 3:11-15 and Rom 14:10. These Scriptures are our major passages.

2Co 5:10 "For we must all appear before the **Judgment Seat of Christ**; that everyone may receive the things done in his body according to that he hath done whether it be good or bad."

1Co 3:11-15 "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

Rom 14:10 "But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you set at nought your brother? For we shall all stand before the **Judgment Seat of Christ.**"

12.9 The Bema is the time of the Christian evaluation report to determine what works were produced under the filling of the Spirit and motivated by doctrine in the soul. These works are rewarded. All other works are "human good," and as such they will be burned as "wood, hay and stubble."

12.10 Lost reward at the Bema does not in any way imply a loss of salvation.

12.11 In 2Co 5:10 the Bema is said specifically to be a place of reward or loss of reward depending upon what the believer does in time.

2Co 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

12.11.1 Compare 2Co 5:10 with Isa 55:11, Eph 2:10, Jam 1:21, 2Ti 3:16-17 and 1Pe 1:4 where the importance of using your time properly in the study of God's protocol is stressed. In these verses it is also clear it is doctrine in the soul of the believer which produces divine good.

Isa 55:11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Jam 1:21 Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you *from yourself*.

2Ti 3:16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

2Ti 3:17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

2Pe 1:4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

12.11.2 My daughter saw a message on a marquee outside a local Baptist Church in Pensacola: "Study the Word of God, you will be tested." And so says 2Co 5:10.

12.12 It follows afortiori that it is easier for God to provide reward for us as believers since He has already performed the difficult, i.e. saving us while we were yet sinners. Rom 5:6-8; 5:15-18; 8:32

Rom 5:6-8 "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His Love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Rom 5:15-18 "But not as the offense, so also is the free gift. For if through the offense of one many be dead, much more the Grace of God, and the gift by Grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offenses unto justification. For if by one man's offense death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Therefore as by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life."

Rom 8:32 "He that spared not His own son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

13. Conclusion

13.1 That physical exercise is of value is established in 1Ti 4:8.

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1Ti 4:8 For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

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1Ti 4:8 For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

13.2 Some have concluded in error that this verse teaches that physical training is of no value. Such a conclusion denies not only the literal reading of the verse but so also metaphors found elsewhere in the Scripture which make clear the importance of physical exercise.

13.3 The importance of following the protocol plan of God as outlined in the Scripture is made clear in Paul's second letter to Timothy:

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2Ti 2:5 And if a man (**Tis**) also (**Kai**) strive for masteries (**Athleo**), yet is he not crowned (**Stephanoo**), except (**Ean Me**) he strive (**Athleo**) lawfully (**Nominos**).

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2Ti 2:5 Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules.

Expanded Translation:

Hear now, if anyone also keeps on competing in the athletic games he will only be crowned if he competes lawfully, that is to say according to the rules of the Isthmus Games.

13.4 Paul in writing to the Church at Corinth uses two athletic metaphors to make clear that his motivation for performing his apostolic duties is to to acquire a heavenly reward.
1Co 9:25-27

1Co 9:25 And every man that striveth for the mastery (**Agonizomai**) is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

1Co 9:26 **I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I**, not as one that beateth the air:

1Co 9:27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

13.5 We find Paul also using the athletic metaphor in three other places:

Gal 5:7 You were **running a good race**. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?

Col 2:18 **Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize**. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions.

Phi 3:14 I press on **toward the goal to win the prize** for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

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