

Lessons from the Olympics
1 Corinthians 9:24-27
3-4-18 AM

The 2018 Winter Olympics had some lessons that might apply for us in Christ. In 1 Cor. 9, Paul references the games of their times as an example of the Christian walk. There are lessons in athletic competition that we need to consider. The Scriptures speak about the church of Christ as a team, of getting onto the team, and of finishing the competition to win the award.

The Need to Be Qualified

When Jesus began preaching, He gave the qualifications for those who would join His team. He was not looking for the best, but for sinners to repent. These are the Kingdom tryouts - Matthew 5:3-12. Those who heard the call needed to participate. This means they needed to obey the commandments to join the team. One is not in the Team of God until they are Kingdom participants - John 3:3-6.

The Surprise Winner

There were some surprise winners in the Olympics. Sometimes we assume that someone who seems spiritually strong will certainly succeed, but Paul tells us that even he had to work to make sure he was saved. It reminds us that the race is not always to the predicted winner - Ecclesiastes 9:11. In the Team of Christ, we need to consider that appearances can deceive. Jesus tells His team not to make judgments based on appearances, but to judge with righteous judgment - John 7:24.

The Need for endurance

Paul's term in 1 Cor. 9 for competing in the games is "*agonizoma*", from which we get the word agony. When Olympic skiers finished the cross country competition, they collapsed at the finish line because they had given it everything. This is how we are to look at our race. "*You have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised*" (Heb. 10:36).

The Surprise Winner

Christianity is a team sport; you cannot compete as an individual (Heb. 10:25). Working as a team was Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 12:14-18. In some events skaters would push their team members ahead. This is a lesson for us, to be pushing one another to succeed - 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Being Disqualified

Russia was disqualified from entering athletes because of prior actions. This is what Paul warned about in 1 Cor. 9:27, the danger of being disqualified despite the desire to race - 2 Corinthians 13:5-7. Russia was disqualified for their actions; Christians can be disqualified by deeds too - Titus 1:16.

Causing Other To Stumble

In competitions where racers were side by side, it was often the case that when one stumbled, other were caused to trip as well. Jesus warned His team of the danger of causing others to stumble. He wanted us to know that carelessness affects others - Mark 9:42-48. Before Paul made his point on Christianity being like completion in a sport, he taught the importance of being attentive to our team - 1 Corinthians 8:13.

Glory of the Victory

There is a great glory in being part of an Olympic team. There is a much greater glory in being part of the team of Christ. Throughout the New Testament, writers encouraged us to remember the great reward at the end of the race. The term they often use is "crown" which actually referred to an athletic reward, similar to a medal today (2 Timothy 4:7-8, James 1:12, Revelation 2:10, 3:11)