

KEEP RUNNING!

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According to God's plan of salvation, doing all that is necessary to save one's soul is sometimes no easy task. I suppose if it were, there would be far more church members doing it. As faithful Christians, we have to watch everything we say and do in our daily lives to stay within the guidelines of faithful Christian living (Col. 3:17; Rom. 10:17; 2 Cor. 5:7). As we grow in living the Christian life, this becomes more and more second nature to us, but we all need to be warned about becoming complacent in living for the Lord.

I am presently thinking of people who are new at certain jobs, such as truck or fork lift drivers. In many cases, it is not the beginners in these jobs who often find themselves in some sort of occupational hazards, whether great or small; but it is the long-timers, the veterans of their specific occupations, who find themselves in some type of fender bender or worse. Of course, this does not hold true in all occupations, but through my experiences and training, it does in many. It is when we become comfortable within our immediate surroundings that we can become vulnerable to complacency.

The complacent attitude reveals itself in different kinds of problems and this is because we are not running the race anymore. Yes, we are still in the race, but not running it like we once did. (I realize that some church members never were in the race, but I am not addressing them in this article). When we, as church members, allow complacency to develop in us, all too often we begin to shed some of our spiritual armor because it has become too heavy for us. We do not find ourselves on the frontline of the fight anymore, so we stop wearing, as it were, our Kevlar vests. Although we continue to be in the army, we are not in the trenches or the "fox holes" on the front lines, engaged in the "dirty" business of hand to hand combat as we once were.

I fully recognize that as we get older our physical bodies start to slow down and we do not move quite as fast, or think and remember as well as we once did. However, the aging process is by no means a reason or an excuse to lessen our zeal and work in seeking to do what we can to gain the prize of eternal life. God does not expect of us what we, through no fault of our own, cannot do. If anything, we should be more adept at identifying and removing any hindrances present in our lives that handicap our running of the spiritual race, which race is necessary for gaining our eternal home in heaven. It was the apostle Paul who wrote, "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain" (1 Cor. 9:24).

In this present study, it would do us well to take a look at the Isthmian Games. These games took place just outside of the city Corinth in Achaia, Greece every second year. It was the greatest of national gatherings during its time. The success of the victor was obtainable only by passing all of his rivals. The winner of this race was adored by his countryman. He and his family were greatly honored by his victory. It begs the question, was this the imagery in Paul's mind when he penned, by inspiration, 1 Corinthians 9:24?

It is only natural for one to begin to wear down after years of trying to spread the good Word of the Gospel with no takers. Our Lord and Savior commanded His apostles to "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth

and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16-17). Of course, by apostolic directive and example, we are to do the same.

Let us not be discouraged by a lack of interest or response to the Gospel call as we go about teaching the truth of the Gospel to others. Jesus did not say we had to rack up a bunch of numbers, or meet certain monthly convert quotas. What our Lord expects us to do is continually, steadfastly, and routinely spread the good Word of Christ with cheer, taking advantage of every opportunity we have to teach others the Gospel. Remember, it was the apostle Peter who admonished Christians to “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15). More times than not, people will not be willing to accept the truth. They will simply have to change too many things in their lives or else they are not interested in the Gospel. Even as you continue to enlighten them on things to come, more often than not, you will be racking up another one in the “no” interest column.

Having written all that has gone before in this article, I refuse to end this sermon in print on a negative note. Keep in mind, that with every “no” you receive, you are that much closer to a “yes.” We should not be thinking about how many will respond to the truth, or whether anyone will study with us, but we should be concentrating on our personal duty to live the Christian life. In so living, as we have opportunity (and we can even create opportunities), we should sow the seed of the kingdom, knowing that the taught Word of God will not return void, but it will accomplish what God intended it to accomplish (Luke 8:11; 2 Tim. 4:1, 2; Isa. 55:11). “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). If it takes you fifty years to save just one soul, you have done your job as a Christian. But, if after fifty years of preaching the truth as the Bible defines truth, no one has obeyed the Gospel, you will have faithfully performed your job for the Lord. Men are free moral agents; if they choose not to accept the free gift, you still ran the race as God required of you personally.

When your time comes to close out your life’s work, and it is time to pass the baton to someone else, you not only have run the race with patience, but have won it. Never take your eye off of the prize—run the race!!~