

# Publishing Editor's column

**O**LYMPICS 2012 has been a recent topic in the media in the UK. The trigger for this is that we have just passed the 'only two years to go' mark in the countdown to the start of the Olympic Games, which are due in London in 2012. Considerable work has already taken place in east London, where the Olympic site is being developed. It seems at the moment that all is progressing to plan.

Of course, it is not just those building the facilities that have planned and are preparing for the start of the events. Those who hope to compete in the games have also prepared and are continuing to prepare for the race of a lifetime. Not only physical preparation is called for, but also the development of the right mind-set to win the gold medal. It ought not to surprise us that all those who are involved in the games are focusing all their energies to achieve their target.

The Apostle Paul uses the idea of competing in the games to develop a powerful exhortation for believers. Writing to the Corinthians he says, "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. 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. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: 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" (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

His first focus is on the intention to win. All run, "but one receiveth the prize"; so the winner is one who commits every effort and thought to winning. In reality, the winner, apart from the adulation of spectators and a personal sense of achievement, had only a wreath of laurel leaves for the prize—a corruptible crown, as Paul pointedly observes, ironically a fitting symbol of human achievement! The believer has an altogether more valuable prize: an incorruptible crown; but how strong is our intention to win it?

Paul returns to this theme in his second letter to Timothy. Reviewing his position after a life of dedicated service, he says, "the time of my departure is come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day: and not only

to me, but also to all them that have loved his appearing" (4:6-8, RV). The idea of running to win might be thought of as being at the expense of other competitors. In the Olympics it would be so, but since this victory is for "all them that have loved his [Jesus'] appearing" he makes clear that this is not so here. Also, like Paul, we are to be engaged in the good fight. There are other fights that we may be engaged in, which come under the banner of charitable activities or crusades to address any number of problems in the world. Good as they may be, the apostle rates them of lesser importance than the good fight that is accepted by those who embrace the hope of the gospel.

The good fight of faith, as he defines it in 1 Timothy 6, is conducted both internally and externally. Internally the struggle is with the nature we have, which is opposed to our growth as children of God. The Word of truth that begets the child of God and sustains his or her growth produces conflict in the mind as the believer chooses to reject the dominion of sin. Indeed, the nurturing of the child of God that we are intended to become will take time, effort and exposure to temptation. Externally, in our relationships both with brethren and sisters and with others, the challenge is to behave in a Christlike way, although the 'flesh' would react differently. Part of this relationship will require us to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. To do this faithfully we need to know, by reading, meditation and discussion with other believers, the elements of that faith.

Paul himself underscores the importance of personal discipline to achieve the desired objective of the crown of life. Those who strive in the games are temperate in all things; that is, they practice self-control—just the point that Jesus made to his disciples when he said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Lk. 9:23). Paul identified in himself the need to run with focus, not uncertainty—lest he should be a castaway! His awareness of the potential for failure should warn us to take the necessary steps in our lives to give priority to following Jesus's teaching and example. Our hope is that, as children of God, we will inherit His Kingdom; it certainly merits our serious commitment now. No sacrifice we make now will seem too great in the day of exaltation.

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