

“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.”

The Apostle Paul spoke the above words in 1 Corinthians 9:27. His comment is consistent with the Bible teaching expressed in our lead article on the first page.

Paul recognized that the quest for salvation was comparable to a contest in this life. We note in the previous verses to the quotation above that he used the example of a man running a race.

The Race

A runner, or any accomplished athlete, must be very religious about his training. Both diet and exercise are important. He must have the strength and the stamina to compete successfully against others who are also working very hard to win.

Perishable Crown

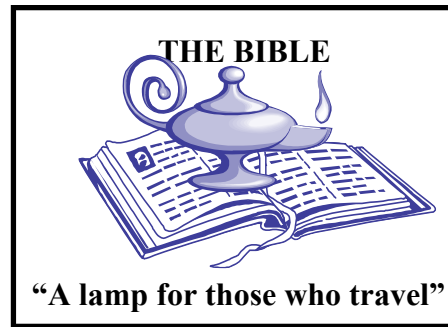
Paul mentions that these athletes compete for a corruptible crown. A gold medal or some other perishable trophy.

We are hoping for a “crown of life” that does not fade away. Our hope is far superior to the prizes that are offered in this life.

Exercise

All athletes exercise their bodies, building strength in those muscles that are important to the event that they will compete in.

Paul recognized that exercise was also important in the race for eternal life. He understood however, that it was not the



body that needed the exercise, but rather the spirit. He told Timothy on another occasion: “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.” (1 Tim 4:8)

Competition

In a natural race, we compete against other runners and there is only one who will win the prize.

This is not the case in the race for eternal life. In fact, our own reward may well depend on how many of our fellow runners we have helped to reach the finish line.

We compete only against our own flesh. As Paul pointed out in his example, he must discipline himself always.

He recognized that it was possible that even after he had preached about the blessings of eternal life to others, he might still be rejected himself.

The lesson again is that there is no guarantee that at the end of our race, we will be found acceptable to the Master when we are judged.

We pray that mercy will be extended to all who are sincere in their effort.

Things Concerning

The Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ

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“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment;-I will not blot out his name out of the book of life”

The passage quoted above is from Rev 3:5. These words help to illustrate a principle of truth that is often overlooked. The entire verse reads: “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life.”

If it is necessary to overcome, so that our name might remain in the book of life, then it is reasonable to conclude that if we do not overcome, our name can be removed from the book, and our hope for eternal life lost.

Enduring Temptation

What are we to overcome? In the Book of James, we find a passage with very similar language: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”

Love for God

James speaks about enduring the trial of the temptations of the flesh. He also adds another qualifier to the blessing of a “crown of life”. Life is reserved for those who love God, and who learn to endure and overcome the natural instincts of our flesh.

Life is Conditional

The principle that we find revealed in scripture is that the hope of eternal life is conditional. There are no guarantees.

Too often people read only the positive implications of the words of scripture. They look at a verse such as

found in Acts 16:31 which says: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved”, and they assume that this is an absolute statement.

Once Saved, Always Saved?

Many people want to believe that once they have accepted the offer of salvation through Christ, that the gift of life is assured. This is not a belief that is consistent with the whole council of God.

Continue in well doing

We are told in Romans 2:6-8 (NIV) That “ God will give to each person according to what he has done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give **eternal life**. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.”

The Book of Life

When we hear the Word of God and embrace the hope of salvation through the gospel, by believing and getting baptized into Jesus Christ, our names are written in God’s book of life.

If we are obedient to the commandments that we have been given, and **if** we continue in well doing, **then** our names will likely stay in the book.

The Grace of God

We must always remember that God is keeping the record. Our names were included through His grace, and they can be removed at His will.

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HE THAT SOWETH TO THE SPIRIT SHALL OF THE SPIRIT REAP LIFE EVERLASTING

There is a promise of everlasting life in the scriptures. We are told that Jesus brought the promise of life to light through the gospel.

The quotation that is above is one of those verses that speaks about this promise of life. It is found in Galatians 6: 7-9. The passage reads: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

A Conditional Promise

We see from this passage that the promise for everlasting life is conditional. "IF" is a big word. IF we sow to the Spirit, we will reap life. IF, however, we sow to the flesh, we will find only corruption.

We Reap What We Sow

It is a simple lesson from nature that whatever we sow into the ground for seed will determine what we reap. A man who plants corn seed does not expect to harvest beans.

"A" For Effort?

The lesson is even more revealing. It also teaches us that our harvest will depend on the amount of work that we put into the entire process.

If we till the ground and plant properly, we must also water, weed and cultivate to bear the fruit of the Spirit.

In spite of our efforts, we are always dependent on our Heavenly Father for His blessing on our fruit. Our effort will be considered and hopefully we will bear fruit one hundred fold through His grace.



ADD to our Faith

Peter makes it very clear that salvation is conditional, and that faith alone is not enough. He tells us:

"And beside this, giving all diligence, **add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.** For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 1: 5-11)

"Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire."

The Master taught us that we must bear fruit. He used the example of a fruit tree. If the tree did not produce, then it was only useful for firewood. (see Matt 7: 17-21)

By their Fruits

There is an important lesson in this example. Jesus taught that we would be able to identify his true followers by their words and deeds.

This knowledge is important to us. Not so that we can judge others, (although such may be necessary at times) but so that we can effectively examine ourselves.

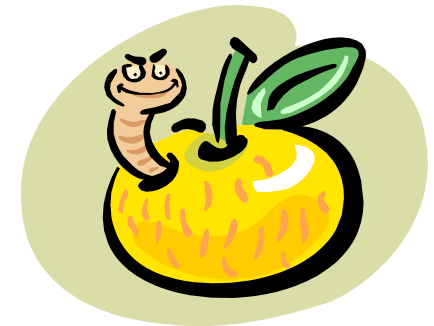
Are we bringing forth good fruit to the glory of God? In the Master's teaching on the tree and its fruit, he adds: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." (Matt 7:21)

It should be apparent from these comments by Jesus that we must "add to our faith", that we must be "doers of the word", and that we must bring forth good fruit if we want to find grace when we stand in judgment for our deeds.

Abide in the Vine

Jesus provided us with all of the instruction that we need so that we can be fruitful in his service. In John 15, he teaches us how important it is to stay close to him.

We read: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into



the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." (John 15:4-8)

Purging the Tree

Jesus also uses another lesson from the natural fruit tree to help us understand his purpose for us. He tells us that: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." (verse 2)

A natural tree is pruned to help it to be more fruitful. If we are the spiritual branches in his vine, we must be trimmed and purged so that we will become more fruitful.

This purging process is often painful. We must sacrifice some of our "favorite things" when they interfere with our ability to serve God faithfully.

Cares and Pleasures

The cares and pleasures of this life can be like thorns and weeds that will choke out the vine. The things of this world are "not of the Father" They are like worms in our apple, and they will make our fruit rotten.

Let us always continue to abide in Christ, so that we may grow in the Lord, and be like trees that produce **good fruit unto eternal life.**