

CHERISH YOUR CROWN! RUN THE RACE DILIGENTLY

1 Corinthians 9:24-27
Chris Afekolu (bishop)

PREAMBLE

CHERISH;

- ✚ a) To hold dear (highly valued): feel or show affection for. b) To keep or cultivate with care and affection for
- ✚ To entertain or harbor in the mind deeply and resolutely.

CROWN;

- ✚ metaphor for Our Salvation in Christ Jesus
- ✚ the crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8), an imperishable or incorruptible crown (1 Corinthians, 9:25), a crown of life (James 1:12, Revelation 2:10 & 1 Peter 5:4)

DILIGENTLY;

- ✚ Quietly and steadily persevering especially in detail or exactness
- ✚ b) characterized by care and perseverance in carrying out tasks

WHY YOU MUST CHERISH YOUR CROWN

We are the Elect of God **{Colossian 3:12}**. We are chosen for salvation through divine mercy. Many find it very difficult to embrace the simplicity of the gospel of salvation. Those engage in field evangelism may have an insight in the marvelous grace God has bestowed on us. The saved are added to the Church, which is the singular reason why we must not gamble with the Divine grace. 2 Peter 1:10 tells usTherefore, brethren, **be even more diligent to make your call and election sure**, for if you do these things you will never stumble; (2 Peter 1:10 NKJV)

BIBLE READING - 1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.

Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air.

No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. (1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NIV)

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NKJV)

In these verses our beloved brother, Apostle Paul gives a clues on the source of his great encouragement, he had to act in such a manner. **He had a glorious prize, an incorruptible crown, in view.** Upon this crown he compares himself to the racers and combatants in the Isthmian games, an allusion well known to the Corinthians, because they were celebrated in their neighborhood: “ Know you not that those who run in a race run all, but one obtaineth the prize”? 1 Corinthians 9:24. All run at your games, but only one gets the race and wins the crown.

Here he motivates us to our duty as disciples: “So run that you may obtain. It is quite otherwise in the Christian race than in your races; only one wins the prize in them. You may all run so as to obtain. You have great encouragement, therefore, to persist constantly, and diligently, and vigorously, in your course. **There is room for all to get the prize. You cannot fail if you run well.** He says he make it his endeavor to run; so do you, as you see me go before you. Note, it is the duty of Christians to follow their faithful ministers (Leaders) closely in the pursuit of eternal glory, and the honor and duty of ministers (Leaders) to lead them in the way.

The apostle presses his advice on the Corinthians by proper arguments drawn from the contenders of the games 1. They subject themselves to very severe training, that they might thus bring their body to the most perfect condition for the race or the boxing. They take pains, and undergo all those hardships, and discipline to obtain a corruptible crown (1 Corinthians 9:25), but we an incorruptible. Those who conquered in these games were crowned only with the withering leaves or branches of trees, of olive, bays, or laurel. But Christians have an incorruptible crown in view, a crown of glory that never fadeth away, an inheritance incorruptible, reserved in heaven for them. And would they yet suffer themselves to be outdone by these racers or wrestlers? Can they use abstinence in diet, exert themselves in racing, expose their bodies to so much hardship in a combat, who have no more in view than an insignificant exclamation of joy or cheers from spectators, or a crown of leaves? And shall not Christians, who hope for the approval of the sovereign Judge, and a crown of glory from his hands, stretch forward in the heavenly race, and exert themselves in beating down their fleshly inclinations, and the strong-holds of sin? 2. **The racers in these games run at uncertainty. All run, but one receives the prize,** 1 Corinthians 9:24. Every racer,

therefore, is at a great uncertainty whether he shall win it or no. But the Christian racer is at no such uncertainty. Every one may run here so as to obtain; but then he must run within the lines, he must keep to the path of duty prescribed. 1 Corinthians 9:26. He who keeps within the limits prescribed, and keeps on in his race, will never miss his crown. Christians must be much more exact and be vigorous with our duties when all are sure of a crown when walk faithfully to the end of the race 3. **He also emphasized the danger of yielding to fleshly inclinations, and pampering the body and its lusts and appetites:** I keep my body under, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away (1 Corinthians 9:27). To prevent this, Paul took so much pains in subduing and keeping under bodily inclinations, lest by any means he himself, who had preached to others, should yet miss the crown, be disapproved and rejected by his sovereign Judge.

EXAMPLE OF THE KING THAT GAMBLED WITH HIS CROWN - SAUL

SIMPLE COMMAND FROM GOD	IMPLEMENTATION OF GOD'S COMMAND BY SAUL	CONSEQUENCE OF SAUL'S ACTION
<p>"You shall go down before me to Gilgal; and surely I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and make sacrifices of peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, till I come to you and show you what you should do." (1 Samuel 10:8 NKJV)</p>	<p>And Samuel said, "What have you done?" And Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash," then I said, 'The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the LORD.' Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering." (1 Samuel 13:11-12 NKJV)</p>	<p>And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. "But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you." (1 Samuel 13:13-14 NKJV)</p>
<p>"Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. 'Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that</p>	<p>And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt. He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and</p>	<p>"I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments." And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the LORD all night. (1 Samuel 15:11 NKJV)</p>

<p>they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey." (1 Samuel 15:2-3 NKJV)</p>	<p>the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed. (1 Samuel 15:7-9 NKJV)</p>	<p>Then Samuel said: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king." (1 Samuel 15:22-23 NKJV)</p>
--	---	---

Why did God reject Saul?

- ✚ Being a bad example. Saul was supposed to “walk before Israel in faithfulness (1 Samuel 12:2), but he did not. One character flaw of Saul was impatience! He could not wait those last few hours or minutes until Samuel appeared. Saul impatience demonstrated his lack of faith in God and His word.
- ✚ Failing to trust in the Lord. During his coronation, Samuel had advised Saul to “fear the Lord” (1 Samuel 12:14, 24), but he feared almost everything else instead. See 1 Samuel 13:11-12. When Saul started walking by sight, not by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7), he started his journey away from the Lord.
- ✚ Being disobedient to God. Samuel instructions were very clear: “wait for me. I will offer the sacrifices” (1 Samuel 10:8). He chooses to act on his own good motives! We could learn from here that God motives are no excuse for neglecting to do what God says.
- ✚ Saul blamed everyone else for his failure to do what God had instructed through Samuel. He blamed the people: “for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God” He blamed the Philistines; “they were assembling at Michmash, getting ready to attack”. He blamed his soldiers. They “scattering from me”. He even blamed Samuel. “You did not come” He blamed everyone except himself. Great lesson to learn for those the play the blame!

Saul did not cherish his crown but rather gambled with it and he paid dearly for it. He lost his crown as King of Israel including his descendants. As Christians, our crown is quite different but action required to keep our crown is to demonstrate/practice the reverse of Saul’s conduct!

RUN YOUR RACE DILIGENTLY

In Paul's illustration, the race is not about the mastery of one person over his competitors; it is not even about the one who wins the prize. Paul was concerned about the manner of running. "Run in such a way that you may win" (1 Cor.9:24). The Christian must run with all of his energy, obeying the rules (commands of God), as if only one could receive the victor's wreath.

Paul did not have self-inflicted pain in mind when he said, "I discipline my body and make it my slave" (1 Cor. 9:27). Paul message is Purposeful living and self-discipline, when integrated into a program of holy living serves a useful purpose. It will result in a life that honors our Savior and King – Jesus Christ

Another area of importance is in our worship! We may learn something about worship from the Samaritan woman Jesus met at the well.

"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:23-24 NKJV)

Jesus said here that not all worship is acceptable to God. He also indicated that place of worship makes no difference today; but rather worshipping God in spirit and truth. For worship to be acceptable, worship must be correct in both spirit **(with the right attitude)** and in truth **(according to God's Word)**.

My dearly beloved brethren, I dare to ask: do you have a proper attitude to God in your worship? When you stroll in arbitrarily with lackadaisical attitude to worship; could this be worshipping God in spirit? A person with a lackadaisical attitude shows no enthusiasm and put forth a half-hearted effort. Wondering why many are not punctual, many are engage strolling around in worship to the extend they mix the Lord's Supper. Some even browse why worship is in progress. Servants of God keeps teaching and admonishing, yet no change: Lackadaisical Attitude! We cannot run the eternal race like this and expect the grace of God. Paul encouraged us to "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses". (1 Timothy 6:12 NKJV)

CONCLUSION

I will conclude with this life event; during a relay race in the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, China, the baton was dropped in the exchange between two US runners. After that, the US team had no chance of winning a medal. Even so, the sprinter ran back to get the baton. He said, 'I did not come nine thousand miles to not finish the race'. In the Christian race, we are not required to be the fastest, but we do have to finish the race correctly as prescribed in the Holy Scripture. At the end his life, Paul wrote,

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing”.
(2 Timothy 4:7-8 NKJV)

Run the race diligently. Finish the race; keep the faith; remain faithful to the Lord. Cherish your crown! Do not lose your crown!
