**WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CHRISTIAN - 4
*The Christian is…an Athlete***

***ACTS 11:26***

**INTRODUCTION** - We are in the midst of studying some descriptions of a Christian. With these descriptions we gain insight into what is expected of us as Christians. Thus far we have noted that a Christian is a citizen (with dual-citizenship) and a solder of Christ. As we continue our study, today we compare the Christian to an athlete.

Athletics are popular in our society. For many they have become an obsession or even an idol. All of us are encouraged in one way or another to be active for the sake of our health. A study of Roman history reveals that the same emphasis existed back when the Bible was being written. There were many cities that hosted major international games. Champions were often treated with celebrity or even god status. Virtually every city had its gymnasiums (different than today) and sports arenas. This afforded New Testament writers opportunities to relate varying sporting events to what our life is to be like. Today we notice a few lessons we can apply relating the Christian to athletics.

As we noted as soldiers that we are at war, so we notice that we are in a race – it is not a sprint, but a marathon; we are struggling as a prize fighter does to win the match, etc.

 **I.** [**1 Tim. 4:7-8**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1%20Tim.%204.7-8) **– Exercise yourself toward godliness**

a.   In giving instructions to Timothy as he teaches the brethren he notes that as a good minister he is to reject profane and old wives fables and to exercise himself to godliness. Then we read, ***“For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.”***

b.  Bodily exercise can be a good thing and as we have learned there is great profit in being active and exercising in one form or another. BUT, as Paul notes, in comparison to spiritual exercise, it is minimal in its usefulness.

c.   But we need to exercise ourselves to godliness. **The word “exercise” is the Greek word γυμνάζω, (gymnazō) the word from which we get our word “gymnasium”.**The word “godliness” means to be devoted to God, to show piety toward Him. IT is one who demonstrates an awesome respect toward God. This is borne out in our conduct.
We need to work at being godly with the same fervor that an athlete works at his sport.

  II. [**2 Tim. 2:5**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/2%20Tim.%202.5) **- Follow the rules.**

a.   **“*And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.*”**

b.  In sports rules are very important. The slightest of variations can lead to a penalty and in many circumstances it can result in one being disqualified. We see examples of this regularly today – as Olympic athletes lose their medals because they fail a drug test or deviate from a course. Teams have been stripped of entire seasons of victory because it is discovered a player was ineligible. Sometimes we think it is harsh, but rules serve a purpose and MUST be followed. If we show leniency then participants will begin to take advantage and thus cheapen the sport at hand. ALSO, it is not fair to those who do choose to follow by the rules.
In our country, we are in what I believe to be a crisis because we have leaders that have chosen to reject certain rules of law. What they seem to not be able to see is how that undermines the whole concept of law itself (If we can pick and choose which laws we have to follow – then we really don’t have law.

c.  This concept has had strong influence in the religious world as well. We have churches that indiscriminately reject certain rules of faith (that which is taught in scripture). The result is a faith in God that is watered down and eventually leads to the creation of a false god (one made in man’s own image).

d.  We must compete according to the rules. In our text, Paul while speaking of endurance notes the importance of rules. As in sporting events, he notes we are not crowned unless we compete according to the rules. Often times cheating happens in sporting events because one doesn’t want to endure. The same is true with God’s word!
Our rule is the Bible – [**2 Tim. 3:16**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/2%20Tim.%203.16)**-**[**17**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/2%20Tim%203.17)**, [Romans 1:16](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Romans%201.16%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank).**
We must keep it completely – [**2 John 9-11**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/2%20John%209-11)**, [Matt. 7:21-23](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Matt.%207.21-23%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank),** [**James 2:10**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/James%202.10) is very specific saying, **“*For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.*”**

 **III.** [**1 Cor. 9:24-27**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1%20Cor.%209.24-27) **– strive to win**

a.  Many of the passages that compare athletics to our lives as Christians are associated with the efforts we put forth to finish our race.

b.  This text gives us several qualities of running a race.

   i. You run to win the prize – finish the race. This shows determination and dedication to the race. This is not the casual racer.
Our goal is heaven! [**2 Tim. 4:7-8**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/2%20Tim.%204.7-8) Paul speaks of finishing the race**, “*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.*”**our text speaks of it being an imperishable crown.
[**Romans 2:7**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Romans%202.7) - speaks of eternal life that awaits those seeking glory, honor and immortality.

   ii. He who competes is temperate – exercising self-control. The training of a serious athlete is intense. It involves every aspect of one’s life – what they eat, how they manage their time, practice, etc.
[**Gal. 5:23**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Gal.%205.23) **-** A needed quality in our lives is self-control it is a fruit of the Spirit;
[**2 Peter 1:6**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/2%20Peter%201.6) - It is one of the “Christian graces.” Peter describes that those who master these things will be abundantly supplied an entrance “into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

   iii. He runs for an imperishable crown – it is said the winner of an event would receive a wreath associated with the games he participated in (much like our medals). But it would wilt and perish. WE are in a race for our very destiny. [**James 1:12**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/James%201.12)**,** [**Rev. 2:10**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Rev.%202.10)**,** [**1 Peter 5:4**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1%20Peter%205.4) - WE are running for the crown of life described as a crown that does not fade away.

   iv. He runs with certainty – he knows where he is going, he has hope. He knows the rules! He is confident that he can win the contest.
**Heb. 6:9-12** - We run the race of life with hope finds the writer speaking of his confidence of better things.

 [**2 Tim. 1:12**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/2%20Tim.%201.12) - Paul said with confidence, **“*For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.*”**

   v. He is not just sparring (training) but in the actual competitive event. He is not just going through the motions. It also implies one who is not just swinging wildly, but he is actually making contact.
Our pursuit of eternal life is not just a game. It is not pretending (that is what hypocrisy is about). Rather it is REAL and it affects everything about our lives. We must make our decisions with deliberate intent.
[**Hebrews 11:13-16**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Hebrews%2011.13-16) demonstrates this.

   vi. He disciplines his body – puts it to the test. The word here actually means to bruise or blacken the eye (by striking under it). I think of a boxer who is continually punched by his trainer to toughen up as he prepares for a fight.
Paul is not speaking of physical self-abuse but he is saying he puts himself to the test to toughen himself up so that he will endure whatever the enemy punches him with.
Similarly, we need self-discipline. We need to make ourselves do what we need to do to make us stronger. With regimen we study His word and pray. We give up things deliberately to make us better spiritually.

[**1 John 3:3**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1%20John%203.3) - “*And everyone who has this hope purifies himself as He is pure.*” You do what you need to do to be right with God.
[**Philippians 3:12-14**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Philippians%203.12-14) - **“*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*”**

   vii. Lest he be disqualified – WHY put yourself to such testing? Because you don’t want to lose or be disqualified. Many sports have qualifying conditions – I think of the Olympic trials - you must meet a certain score or time or some other quality (like a certain weight - boxing, weight-lifting, wrestling, etc.) to even qualify to compete (this eliminates those who are not serious). WE are in our race to win.
IT is worthy of note that Paul here realizes that even he could be disqualified. [**Gal. 5:4**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Gal.%205.4)**,** [**2 Peter 2:20-22**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/2%20Peter%202.20-22) - We can fall from grace is a relatively strong straight forward passage declaring we can fall away and be worse off than before we were saved. Think about that one.

 **IV.** [**Heb. 12:1-2**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Heb.%2012.1-2) **– lay aside every weight and run with endurance.**

a.  Often in training, runners will add weights to their ankles to strengthen themselves. But in the actual race, they take the weights off and run without any resistance.

b.  In the race we are entered in, we need to shed ANYTHING that that slows us down or hinders us in our pursuit of the goal. We need to get rid of sin in our lives, or even things that may not be sinful within themselves but they become a hindrance.

c.  This verse also calls for us to keep our eye on the finish line where our Lord and that “great cloud of witnesses” is waiting for us to join them.

 **V.** [**2 Tim. 4:7-8**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/2%20Tim.%204.7-8) **- The reward – a victor’s crown**

a. [**2 Timothy 4:7–8**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/2%20Timothy%204.7%E2%80%938) - As Paul is about to die he writes this final letter to Timothy. He says, **“*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.*”**

b.  There is a finish line and there is a reward. Eternal life in heaven awaits us if we finish the race. We have previously discussed the victor’s crown we will receive. Here we are again reminded that the race we run is worth it.

**CONCLUSION** –

The Christian is described as an athlete.

Just as you have to enlist in the army, you have to enter the race.

Have you entered the race on the Lord’s team by obeying the gospel?

Are you still running in that race?

Have you been cheating? If so, take care of it (repent) and get back on track!

Think about it!!!