

## Galatians 5:7-15

### Running the Race

The Christian life can be thought of as a race. There is a starting point and a finish line and then there is a prize. The apostle Paul called it a "crown of righteousness. Near the end of his life he wrote the following in 2 Timothy,

I have fought the good fight,  
I have finished the race, I have  
kept the faith. <sup>8</sup> 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)

Actually, the New Testament speaks of five crowns awarded for faithful Christian living. There is the imperishable crown, the crown of rejoicing, the crown of righteousness, the crown of glory and the crown of life.<sup>1</sup>

When Paul first arrived at Galatia he made known the good news of Jesus Christ and the coming kingdom of God. And the Galatians began their race of faith, hope and love. But as they were making their way around the track someone cut in front of them and tripped them up. So Paul wrote this in chapter 5 verse 7.

You ran well. Who hindered you  
from obeying the truth?

The Greek word translated "hindered" really means to cut in front of someone. The translation titled "The Message" reads, "You were really running superbly! Who cut in on you?" Who cut in on the Galatians were the false teachers who were teaching that faith is great if you want to be justified. But if you really want to be sanctified and live a holy and happy life you need to follow the Old Testament law.

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<sup>1</sup> These crowns and their definitions will be posted at the end of this teaching

Now imagine running a race and as you run you begin to get tired. And your coach calls you over and says, "I've got just the right thing to help you out." And then he straps a backpack full of rocks to your back. And puts lead weights around your ankles and puts a suitcase full of books in each hand. Then slaps you on the bottom and says "Go, get 'em champ!"

How long do you think you could run well like that? Not very long. To run the race you need power. When we believe the gospel of Jesus Christ we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit is the power, all the power we need to run the race of faith, hope and love. In Acts 1:8 Jesus said,

But you shall receive power  
when the Holy Spirit has come  
upon you; and you shall be  
witnesses to Me

We witness for Christ not just by what we say, but also by how we live. Our lives of joy, peace, love, faith and hope are the result of the Spirit within us and these attributes attract people to Christ.

You ran well. Who hindered you  
from obeying the truth? <sup>8</sup> This  
persuasion does not come from  
Him who calls you. <sup>9</sup> A little leaven  
leavens the whole lump.  
(Galatians 5:7-9)

The teaching of the legalists did not come from God. God is not the one who will put weights on you in your race of faith. He wants you to know the truth, because the truth will make you free. And even a little wrong doctrine, like leaven, can spread to more errors both in what we believe and how we live. So how do we run well? We have an answer in the letter to the Hebrews.

Hebrews was written to show that the Old Testament with its rituals and laws all pointed to Jesus Christ and the gift of the Spirit. And now since the time of Christ's death and resurrection the Old Testament system is obsolete. And if we want to follow anything from the Old Testament let's follow the faith and hope of the great Old testament believers as recorded in Hebrews 11. And then we read the following in chapter 12.

Therefore we also, since we are  
surrounded by so great a cloud  
of witnesses, let us lay aside every  
weight, and the sin which so

easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1, 2)

To lay aside every weight means to lay aside all the Old Testament rules and rituals. Take off the backpack of rocks and put down the suitcases full of books and the ankle weights and look to Jesus. He endured, he ran his race and he won it! And he can help you too. He will work in you through the Spirit to energize you and sustain you. And lay aside every sin which ensnares us and trips us up. And sin gets its grip on you when we look too longingly at the world around us. The apostle John wrote,

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup>For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. <sup>17</sup>And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

The lusts or wrongful desires of our flesh, the lust of our eyes and the pride of life always pull us away from God toward sin. Do you remember from the beginning of this study I quoted Paul about running his race of faith and receiving a crown? Let's read this again and we will also read about a man named Demas who did not finish his race.

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. <sup>7</sup>I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup>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.<sup>9</sup> Be diligent to come to me quickly;  
<sup>10</sup> for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—  
(2 Timothy 4: 6-10)

Demas had been one of Paul's closest associates. But he abandoned Paul during Paul's toughest trial, because he loved the world more than he loved the Lord. The more of the world you get into your heart and mind the less joy in the Lord you will have. And the less you will be willing to serve and even sacrifice for others. Let's return to Galatians 5 and pick up in verse 10.

I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.  
(Galatians 5:10)

This verse is both wonderful and terrifying at the same time. It is wonderful, because the apostle is expressing encouraging assurance that the Lord will be faithful to bring the Galatians back to the truth. This is why we should always pray for believers. Jesus loves us, and we should remember that as our High Priest he will pray for us before God. We are told in Hebrews 7: 25 that Jesus always makes intercession for us. And as the head of the church he will work in each and every believer.

As for the false teachers, here is the terrifying part, they will be judged. The apostle Peter tells us that they will face swift and total destruction at the judgment seat of Christ.<sup>2</sup> But a question comes up. What about the sincere, but uninformed teacher who preaches error? Obviously, he should learn the truth.<sup>3</sup> But 1 Corinthians 3:15 tells us at the judgment his wrong works will be burned, but he himself will be saved. Back to Galatians.

And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased.  
(Galatians 5:11)

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<sup>2</sup> 2 Peter 2:1

<sup>3</sup> Acts 18:25, 26

It seems that in an effort to deflect criticism away from themselves the false teachers made a claim that Paul taught circumcision too. But Paul responded by asking, "If I did why am I persecuted? And why is my message of salvation by faith in the cross of Christ such an offense to people?"

The Greek word translated "offense" really means a scandal—the message of the cross was scandalous. There were two reasons for this. First, in Paul's day the idea of being saved by a crucified criminal was an outrage, it was disgusting. To believe that God's Messiah was crucified was disgraceful. The fact that God would allow His Son to suffer in the place of sinners, instead of punishing us was morally repugnant.

But secondly, and this is why the cross is offensive even today; the gospel of Christ demands that we lay down whatever righteousness we think we have on our own, because of what we have done or are doing. And then come to God with nothing in order to receive the perfect righteousness that comes from Christ. To the average Jew who thought of himself as righteous because he strove to follow the law, or the Gentile who thought of himself as a moral citizen this was difficult to accept.

Even today people recoil at the idea that they need to be saved, because they believe that they are generally a good person and perhaps better than most. But we are not saved by anything we do. In the words of an old hymn, we are saved when we say, "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling."<sup>4</sup> Now Paul sends out a Tweet about the false teachers in a very Donald Trump kind of way.

I could wish that those who trouble  
you would even cut themselves off!  
(Galatians 5:12)

Paul was so angry, in a righteous way, with the false teachers that he said in effect "If circumcision is they way to be righteous with God, why don't you teachers go all out and castrate yourselves?" Now at first blush we might think Paul crossed the line here. But not of we remember what Jesus about false teachers. In Matthew 18:6 he said,

Whoever causes one of these little  
ones who believe in Me to sin, it  
would be better for him if a millstone  
were hung around his neck, and he  
were drowned in the depth of the sea.

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<sup>4</sup> Rock of Ages

Telling the Galatians to reject God's grace in Christ and to follow the law instead was certainly causing sin. Now after Paul's sarcastic Tweet to the false teachers he turns again to the Galatians on a more positive note.

For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.  
**14** For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."  
(Galatians 5:13, 14)

We are free from the Old Testament law so that we can voluntarily love and serve one another being motivated by Christ's love to us. Our being justified by faith should lead to our being sanctified by faith. Or let me put it this way, Christ's good work for us, leads us to do good works for others. Good works do not lead to salvation, they are the fruit of our salvation. When you try to be righteous by works you will begin to judge other people by their works. Such a path leads to division, strife and selfishness.

But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!  
(Galatians 5:15)

Legalism always leads to judging others and to division and strife. But the manifested love of God is gracious, merciful, practical and even sacrificial as we love and serve others. Remember Jesus said we are to love one another just as he loved us.<sup>5</sup> And so here are some questions for us. Do we treat others with respect? Are we aware of one another's needs? When we hear a rumor about someone do we pass it along or put a stop to it? Are we praying for one another, encouraging to one another and forgiving one another?

We have been given a tremendous gift by God's grace alone through faith in Christ alone. And this is the love of God poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. The words of the apostle John seem a fitting end to this study. "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John 13:34, 35

<sup>6</sup> 1 John 4:7

## The Rewards of Five Crowns

There are five crowns mentioned in the New Testament that will be awarded to believers. The Greek word translated “crown” is *stephanos* (from which we get the personal name of Stephan. The *stephanos* was a laurel wreath or some form of garland. In ancient Greece it was awarded as a badge of royalty, a prize for achievement in the public athletic games or as a symbol of honor and dignity. In the New Testament this crown is used to describe the rewards that believers will receive for their love, faith and service.

It should also be known that according to 1 Corinthians 3:1-15 that the works that we do that do not bring glory to God will be judged and burned up. Even so the believer will be saved. Here are the five crowns.

1. **The Imperishable Crown:** 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*.<sup>25</sup> 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* (1 Corinthians 9:24, 25)

People train and work and strive after goals in this life that bring rewards, but not eternal rewards. For example an athlete trains to win in the competition. But after the crowning moment then it is over. But we are to train to be faithful to live our Christian lives with faith and endurance, striving to be our best for God. And when we do we will receive a crown that will never perish.

2. **The Crown of Rejoicing:** But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire.<sup>18</sup> Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us.<sup>19</sup> For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?<sup>20</sup> For you are our glory and joy (1 Thessalonians 2:17-19)

All of the people that we lead to faith in Christ or to whom we teach the truth helping them to live lives of faith, hope, love and joy will be our crown of rejoicing when we enter the kingdom of God. This is also why Hebrews 10:24, 25 encourages us to assemble together to worship and serve God and to help one another to do good works and live a life of love.

3. **The Crown of Righteousness:** I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup> 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)

Here is a crown promised to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ and eagerly await his return. The crown is for those who are motivated to fight the good fight of faith even during times of discouragement and challenges. This crown is for those who strive for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:12-14). Turn your eyes upon Jesus and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

4. **The Crown of Glory:** The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: <sup>2</sup> Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; <sup>3</sup> nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; <sup>4</sup> and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away (1 Peter 5:1-4)

Elders (leaders, pastors, teachers, evangelists, etc.) all those in the church who serve God's people with their whole heart and strength and love receive a crown of glory. Some people serve out of a sense of duty and others for personal gain. Jesus taught that if anyone wants to be great he must be a servant to all (Mark 10:41-45), just as the Lord Jesus Christ who came not to be served but to serve.

5. **The Crown of Life:** Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life (Revelation 2:10)

Philippians 1:29 tells us, "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." And 2 Timothy 2:3 declares, "You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." Sometimes life is hard for a believer. There may be ridicule, hatred, persecution and even death. The worst the world can do to a believer is end his or her life. But God has called us to everlasting life! Jesus Christ came to bring us a more than abundant life (John 10:10). This life and this crown will be granted in the kingdom of God. Be faithful.

