

Rules for the Race

Intro:

1. When you came to the Lord, you were born again & became a new creature - a baby in Christ.
2. Babies have to grow - & so do newborn Christians.
3. **I Cor 14:20 - Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regards to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.**
 - a. God's part in your growth process is to provide you with strength & direction through His indwelling Holy Spirit.
 - b. Your part in your growth is pictured here as a race for a prize!
4. **I Cor 9:24 - 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.**
 - a. Progress on the Christian journey to maturity is necessary to keep you from falling away.
 - b. **ILL: "Children, Come Up Higher."**
5. If your part of the growing process is like a race - what are the rules?

Philippians 3:12-16

I. v12-13a - Rule # 1 - Don't Think You've Arrived!

- A. **Matt 5:48 - Be perfect, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is perfect.** How do you become perfect?
 1. **Perfect** (τέλειος) = come to the end, complete or mature.
 2. As a Christian in this life, you are an incomplete person. **ILL: Promise Keeper's shirt "Man Under Construction".**
 3. So - what are God's resources to help you mature in Christ?
 - a. **Eph 4:11-13 - It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.**
 - b. The Lord gave you elders to equip the saints. That's you!
 - c. The saints - that's you - are to do the work of the ministry.
 - d. The result - a unity of your faith & knowledge of the Son of God.
 - e. This makes mature, complete people!
- B. **v12b - So Paul pressed on - he pursued after maturity so he could grasp hold of it.**
 1. **Press on** (διώκω) = cause to run, set in quick motion, pursue.
 2. **ILL: The Road to Damascus. (Act 9:1-19)**
 3. **Take hold** (καταλαμβάνω) = take eagerly, seize, possess. Paul wanted to grasp hold of his goal of maturity or completeness the same way Lord Jesus grasped hold of him!

II. v13b-14 - Rule # 2 - Don't Look Back!

- A. Lord Jesus said that a man who puts his hand to the plow & looks back, is not fit for the kingdom of heaven - **Lk 9:62**. **ILL: Farmer with his eye on the landmark.**
- B. Paul's example of this.
 - 1. **v13b** - Paul forgot his past experiences.
 - 2. **v14** - Paul kept the goal in mind.
 - 3. **Heb 12:1-2** - Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
 - 4. An Olympic runner strains every muscle to win.
 - 5. God doesn't reserve the prize for just one person. It's for everyone who completes the race. He wants you to take your Christian walk seriously!
 - 6. Your incentive for making this Christian journey to maturity is simply to please God. **ILL: "The Pretty Canary"**.
 - 7. The prize.
 - a. To the ancient Olympian - a perishable wreath.
 - b. To the modern Olympian - a medal of gold, silver or bronze.
 - c. To you - the high calling, the status God has called you to become!

III. v15-16 - Rule # 3 - Don't Quit!

- A. **v15** - Continue to seek God's direction in your life through His Word.
 - 1. **Heb 6:1** - Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity . . .
 - 2. **Maturity** in **v15** & **maturity** in **Heb 6:1** are the same word as in **Matt 5:48**.
 - a. In **Matt 5:48** the Lord tells you to become mature in your faith.
 - b. **Heb 6:1** tells you how to become mature in your faith.
 - c. Then, **v15** here, tells you to continue on your journey to maturity even though you may be more mature than others!
- B. **v16** - Let your life radiate your maturity of faith in your conduct!
 - 1. Have you ever been devastated emotionally when someone you respected for their maturity fell from your pedestal?
 - 2. How does this relate to spiritual warfare?
 - a. The Christian journey is a constant struggle.
 - b. The Holy Spirit encourages you & gives you strength.
 - c. Satan puts temptation in your path.
 - d. You decide who wins!

Where are you on your spiritual journey? Are you growing in your faith or just existing? Get into the Word. Follow the godly examples of more mature Christians.

Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. - Matt 5:16