

1 Corinthians 9:25

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

Analysis

And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. The Greek *agōnizomai* (ἀγωνίζομαι, "strive, compete") gives us "agonize"—intense exertion. Athletes practice *enkrateuomai* (ἐγκρατεύομαι, "self-control, temperance"), abstaining from pleasures and luxuries to maximize performance. Ancient training regimens involved strict diets, sexual abstinence, and rigorous exercise. Paul applies this to Christian living: spiritual victory requires disciplined self-denial.

Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. The Greek *phthartos* (φθαρτός, "corruptible, perishable") versus *aphthartos* (ἄφθαρτος, "incorruptible, imperishable") draws a stark contrast. The Isthmian victor's wreath withered within days; the believer's crown is eternal (2 Tim 4:8; Jas 1:12; 1 Pet 5:4; Rev 2:10). If athletes endure hardship for fading glory, how much more should Christians discipline themselves for eternal reward? Paul argues from lesser to greater: earthly athletes train harder than many Christians pursue holiness.

Historical Context

Ancient athletes trained for ten months under strict supervision before competing. Diets excluded wine, rich foods, and delicacies. Sexual activity was forbidden. Violations meant disqualification. The victor's crown (Greek *stephanos*, στέφανος)

was woven from pine or celery—fragile, temporary, yet prized above wealth. Paul contrasts this perishable wreath with the believer's eternal inheritance.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does athletic self-discipline illustrate the necessity of Christian sanctification?
2. What "corruptible" pursuits tempt you to neglect the "incorruptible" crown?
3. How does the contrast between temporary and eternal rewards motivate holy living?

Interlinear Text

πάντα	δὲ	ὁ	ἀγωνιζόμενος	πάντα	ἐγκρατεύεται	
every man	And	G3588	that striveth for the mastery	every man	is temperate	
G3956	G1161		G75	G3956	G1467	
ἐκεῖνοι	μὲν	οὖν	ἵνα	φθαρτὸν	στέφανον	λάβωσιν
they	G3303	Now	do it to	a corruptible	crown	obtain
G1565		G3767	G2443	G5349	G4735	G2983
ἡμεῖς	δὲ	ἄφθαρτον				
we	And	an incorruptible				
G2249	G1161	G862				

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 2:10 (Parallel theme): Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried;

and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

2 Timothy 2:5 (Parallel theme): And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.

1 Timothy 6:12 (Parallel theme): Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

Revelation 3:11 (Parallel theme): Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

James 1:12 (Parallel theme): 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.

2 Peter 1:6 (Parallel theme): And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

1 Peter 5:4 (Parallel theme): And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

1 Peter 1:4 (Parallel theme): To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

Galatians 5:23 (Parallel theme): Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.