

## Striving Lawfully for Our Hope

*“And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully”  
(2 Timothy 2:5)*

David Long

The Bible pictures Christianity in many ways. At times it is pictured as a war to be fought and Christians are soldiers of Christ in that war. The Bible says, *“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints”* (Ephesians 6:10-18). *“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”* (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). *“This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare”* (1 Timothy 1:18). *“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier”* (2 Timothy 2:3-4). In still other passages it is pictured as a vineyard or a field to be worked and Christians are laborers in that vineyard or field. *“For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard”* (Matthew 20:1). *“The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits”* (2 Timothy 2:6). *“No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God”* (Luke 9:62).

In this lesson we want to look at Christianity pictured as a race to be run and Christians are the runners in that race. *“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God”* (Hebrews 12:1-2). *“Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. 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. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway”* (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). *“And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully”* (2 Timothy 2:5). Looking at our text what are some things we learn about the Christian race?

First, The Christian race is a striving. “Strive” means “to engage in a contest, contend in public games, contend for a prize; to endure, suffer”. We get our English word “athlete” from this word. Like an athlete who is striving to win so the Christian is to. The difference is, the Christian is striving to win a spiritual or heavenly crown. The hope we have at the end of the race is the eternal salvation of our souls. *“Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls”* (1 Peter 1:9). The hope we have is laid up for us in heaven. *“For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel”* (Colossians 1:5). But in order to win the crown we must strive, endure, or suffer, which implies effort on our part.

Second, In order to receive that prize we must strive lawfully. “Lawfully” means “agreeable to the law, properly.” As in any “games” there are rules to be followed. Can you imagine playing a game with no rules? Can you imagine playing a game where you just make up the rules as you go along or changing the rules in the middle of the game? Doesn’t that sound like the denominational world when it comes to Christianity? They say, “As long as you are sincere, you can worship God any way you please.” If we are going to strive lawfully for our hope then we will worship God as His word directs (John 4:23-24). If we are going to strive lawfully for our hope then we will “play” by God’s rules. What happens to athletes who won’t play by the rules? Christianity has a rule book. Christianity has a law and if we are not willing to follow the law then we will not receive the crown. Galatians 6:2 calls the rule book, “The law of Christ.” James 1:25 and 2:12 call the rule book, “The law of liberty.” Romans 8:2 calls the rule book, “The law of the Spirit.” What is that rule book? It’s the New Testament! And there is only one set of rules. *“let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing”* (Philippians 3:16). *“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment”* (1 Corinthians 1:10). The Bible clearly teaches that one’s faithfulness in following the Lord is directly connected to receiving a crown. *“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing”* (2 Timothy 4:7-8). *“...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life”* (Revelation 2:10). *“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”* (James 1:12). Is it possible for a Christian to fall out of the race? Those who teach “once saved always saved” would have to say NO! But the Bible teaches that it is. *“Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace”* (Galatians 5:4). *“Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it”* (Hebrews 4:1). *“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God”* (Hebrews 3:12). *“Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul”* (Hebrews 10:38-39).

How does one enter the Christian race? It begins by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17) Then one must believe it or that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God (John 8:24). Then one must repent of their sins (Acts 17:30). Then one must confess their faith in Christ (Acts 8:37) Then one must be immersed in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Upon doing that the Lord will add you to his Church (Acts 2:47) and you will be in the race. Then you must run it faithfully to the end (Revelation 2:10).