

## Cereal Box Christians

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### Part 2) We are to Compete like Cereal Box Christians.

Today at the preaching of this lesson will mark the closing ceremony of the 2010 Winter Olympics. As you might know the United States won in the overall medal account for the first time since 1932. It was a great event for our nation and as a result there will be many new faces on boxes of Wheaties, for that is yet another milestone for competing athletes. If you are a great athlete, a pinnacle would have to be to end up on a box of cereal.

In light of this, we started a three part series entitled Cereal Box Christians. If there was cereal in heaven, what would it take to end up on the front of the box? In the last lesson we introduced three thoughts from the passage of Hebrews 12:1-2.

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

#### Three Points

1. We are to PRACTICE like Cereal Box Christians.
2. We are to COMPETE like Cereal Box Christians.
3. We are to CELEBRATE like Cereal Box Christians.

It was in the last lesson that we examined what it is like to train as an athlete of the first-century for we must PRACTICE like Cereal Box Christians. The standard rule is *how you practice is what you become an expert in*. If we practice righteousness, then we will be a champion in righteousness. If we practice sin then we will become a champion sinner. In this lesson we will observe that we must COMPETE like a Cereal Box Christian.

#### A) We must COMPETE according to the rules.

##### **Sven Kramer Loses Gold Medal: Dutch Speed Skater Disqualified**

by Scott Wu | February 23, 2010 at 08:05 pm

The Dutch Olympic Speed Skating team is in shock as Sven Kramer Loses his Gold Medal - the Dutch Speed Skater has been Disqualified at the Richmond, Olympic Oval.

Sven Kramer thought he had won Gold when he finished the men's 10,000 meter speedskating event on Tuesday in Vancouver Winter Olympics. He finished in 12:54.50, an Olympic record, but later learned that he committed a lane change violation. Sven Kramer was disqualified as a result. Sven Kramer was furious when his coach informed him the bad news. He flung his glasses and kicked at lane markers in frustration.

With eight laps remaining in the 25-lap race, referee Hannu Koivu of Finland ruled that Kramer made an "incorrect changing of lanes." Kramer himself didn't know of the

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penalty until he crossed the finish line in 12:54.50 – which would have been an Olympic record, but now it is reduced to a historical footnote.

It was very frustrating to see this happen to the Dutch speed skater that had trained for so many years. To go from an Olympic Record to nothing seemed wrong, but it was the rules. When he entered the competition, it was with the understanding that he would follow the rules, including the one about changing lanes...every time! Those in charge made sure that he and everyone else competed according to the rules for that is the only way a true competition can be completely fair. Young Sven learned the hard way.

In 2 Timothy chapter 2, Paul was advising Timothy to hang tough for the battle of faith that existed in Ephesus. He used three types of common professions of the day to illustrate the point: the soldier, the athlete and the farmer. It is on the second occupation that we gather our focus.

2 Timothy 2:5 Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules.

Just like in the Olympic Games of today, those athletes of the past also had to follow the rules.

- They could not start a race until the official said to run.
- They could not kick when in a boxing contest.
- They could not have six horses in the four-horse chariot race.



There were major rules and minor rules, but they were all rules and had to be followed by the athletes. To be caught cheating in an ancient Olympic Game was a serious offense. Here are a few examples from history of those that did not follow the rules.

- Gelo of Syracuse: In 485 BC, Gelo the tyrant persuaded an Olympic running champion Astylus of Croton to run for his city instead. This simply was not good protocol and the Crotons assumed it was for bribery. Seriously angered at this cheating, they tore down Astylus' Olympic statue and seized his house.
- Lichas of Sparta: In 420, the Spartans were excluded from participation. When a Spartan named Lichas entered his chariot horses as Thebans. When the team won, Lichas ran onto the field. The Hellanodikai sent attendants to flog him as punishment.
- Eupolus of Thessaly: During the 98th Olympics, in 388 B.C. a boxer named Eupolus bribed his 3 opponents to let him win. The Hellanodikai fined all four men. The fines paid for a row of bronze statues of Zeus with inscriptions explaining what had happened. These 6 bronze statues were the first of the *zanes*. While many nations went out of their way to wipe away the memory of cheaters, the



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Greeks actually tried to immortalize the cheater in their cheating by having statues saying so.

- Sotades the Cretan: In the 100th Olympics, Ephesus bribed a Cretan athlete, Sotades, to claim Ephesus as his city when he won the long race. Sotades was exiled by his own nation.

They were very serious about competing and to compromise on the rules would never be tolerated. The Bible is also clear that if we are going to be a champion in Christianity. We must follow the rules if we ever plan to be a Cereal Box Christian; simple rules like...

- Loving each other: John 13:34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.
- Keeping a clean mind: Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.
- Keeping a clean life: 1 Peter 2:11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

### B) We must COMPETE with a goal in mind.

Philippians 3:13-14 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

This is Olympic-racing language that Paul is using in this passage. He does not regard himself as already having won the race to heaven, but to run with the goal still out in front of him. Just as the athlete runs toward the prize and does not look back, Paul is running with a goal in mind. He uses the same type of language in the following passage.

*1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. <sup>25</sup> Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. <sup>26</sup> Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; <sup>27</sup> but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.*

If we ever want to be a cereal box cover championship relationship with God, it is going to take always having the goal out in front of us. We will spend much more time on the goal in the next lesson, but will define the ultimate goal here. The ultimate goal in Christianity is to go to heaven and live for an eternity with God.

- Titus 1:2 in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago,
- Titus 3:7 so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life.

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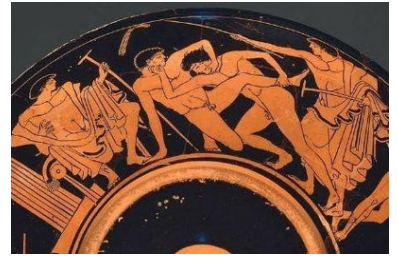
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- 2 Timothy 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life in Christ Jesus,

If we would always have the goal in mind when running the race we would always be on track. Take away the goal of a task and you completely jeopardize the task. We must compete with a goal in mind.

### C) We must COMPETE without compromise.

Ephesians 6:12 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*.



Paul is obviously familiar with the Olympic Games because he uses the Olympic language over and over. Here he uses the sport *wrestling* to describe our struggle against the world. Unlike the wrestler that is grappling with flesh and blood, the Christian wrestles against a spiritual realm of evil. There is no compromising when dealing with an athletic competition.

*Jude 3 Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.*

Jude is using a phrase *contend earnestly* that referred to a couple of competitors that went into a ring and only one will come out. For the faith they were to put up a struggle as if we were gladiators fighting it out for survival.

That is how the Christian is to compete against the world for the cause of Christ, **WITHOUT COMPROMISE**. We do not let our guard down for a moment, knowing that Satan will take advantage of it. Paul would use boxing language from the Olympics to emphasize this very thing. *1 Timothy 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*

If we ever plan to be a Cereal Box Christian, we are going to have to not only practice like one, but also compete as one. In the next lesson we will cover the fact that we must **CELEBRATE** like a Cereal Box Christian.