

The Word of God likens a Christian to be a runner in a race. This comparison is to be taken very seriously. The Apostle Paul is imploring us to exert ourselves to make every effort to win.

1 Corinthians 9:24 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.**

This is no ordinary race. The stakes are exceedingly high. There are not only positive rewards for winning the race, but also **negative** consequences for losing it! Life and death are the issues in this race. The outcome is not manifested now in this present age but, rather, in the age to come.

This present evil age ends abruptly when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to the earth to be crowned as the King of kings and Lord of lords.

The disciples of Jesus associated the Lord's coming with the end of the age:

Matthew 24:3 Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the **disciples** came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of **Your coming, and of the end of the age?"**

At the second coming, Jesus Christ will be the judge of all:

Jude 14-15 Now Enoch, the seventh in descent, beginning with Adam, even prophesied of them, saying, "Look! **THE LORD IS COMING** with thousands and thousands of his holy ones, **15 TO EXECUTE JUDGMENT ON ALL**, and to convict every person of all their thoroughly ungodly deeds that they have committed, and of all the harsh words that ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

The "ALL" that the Lord will execute judgment on, in verse 15, is "His people":

Psalm 50:3-6 Our **GOD SHALL COME**

, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. 4 He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, **THAT HE MAY JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.** 5 Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. 6 And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself. Selah.

Hebrews 10:30

For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, **THE LORD SHALL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.**

2 Corinthians 5:10 For **WE MUST ALL APPEAR** before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad [or evil].

In that day, Christians that ran well and finished their course, like the apostle Paul, shall be crowned with great honor:

2 Timothy 4:7-8 I have fought a good fight, **I have finished my course**, I have kept the faith: 8 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.**

Those that are rewarded crowns will be worthy to enter into the kingdom of God by having a PART in the first resurrection to reign with Christ for a thousand years:

Revelation 20:6 Blessed and holy is he that hath **PART** in the first resurrection : on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall **REIGN WITH HIM A THOUSAND YEARS.**

Keep in mind that the race has RULES, which we must OBEY NOW, in this sinful and perverse age of temptations, if we want to be crowned at the end:

2 Timothy 2:5 Also if anyone competes as an athlete, **he will not be crowned** as the winner **unless he competes according to the rules.**

Not every Christian wants to run according to the rules in this age! The majority of Christians are not taking heed to the warnings of Scripture. They do not FEAR GOD, repent of sins, or strive to be holy by giving their full attention to the clear commands of Jesus Christ in the Bible. In contrast, the majority of Christians today are striving to find ways to get around God's warnings and clear commands by twisting Scripture and readily accepting traditional interpretations without searching the Scriptures. They have no interest in or concern for future accountability before a Holy God.

Many will depart from living by faith, which is focusing on "things hoped for" and "things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). Faith is focusing on the future crown! Yet, the FOCUS of most Christians will be what they can gain in this present age (i.e. pleasure, comfort, entertainment, reputation, popularity, and convenience) under Satan's reign. Restraining one's lust in order to be righteous in his behavior will be called legalism and psychologically incorrect. These Christians will congregate in consumer-oriented churches that are user-friendly and led by sissy leaders who are afraid to speak the truth in love.

Therefore, not every Christian will be WILLING to deal with his sin honestly and seriously as the Lord commands His disciples:

Mark 9:35,47- 48 After he sat down, he called **THE TWELVE** and said to them , "If anyone wants to be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." 47 If your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better to **enter into the kingdom of God** (i.e. "they lived and reigned the thousand years," Rev.20:6) with one eye than to have two eyes and be **cast into hell GEHENNA of the FIRE**, (*Young's Literal Translation*), 48 where their worm never dies and **THE FIRE** is never quenched.

The Lord is warning His disciples of the danger of future FIRE. The opposite of entering into the kingdom of God, the millennial kingdom age, in order to be crowned with Jesus Christ in His magnificent glory as overcomers, is to be cast into "the gehenna of the fire." That is why Christian people need to RUN for the CROWN! To be burned with fire HURTS. To spend a thousand years in a place that burns with fire will not be fun. Is it any wonder that Jesus Christ said, "there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" associated with being cast out of the kingdom into FIRE?

Matthew 13:40- 42 As therefore the tares are gathered and **burned in the FIRE**; so shall it be in **the end of this age** (*before the thousand years*). 41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall **gather out of his kingdom** all things that offend, and them (the tares) which do [practice] iniquity; 42 And shall **cast them into a furnace of fire: THERE SHALL BE WAILING AND GNASHING OF TEETH.**

Gehenna was a literal valley, at the time of Jesus, just outside the city walls of Jerusalem. It was a place where the trash of the city and dead bodies were dumped and burned. Surely, it was a comparison His disciples could relate to and appreciate. James, in his epistle, also tells us that gehenna was a place associated with FIRE "the tongue is a fire" and is set on fire by the gehenna," (James 3:6). You maybe thinking, "Are Christians going to be punished in litera

l fire?? Interpret it any way you like, literal or figurative, it will not be a place you will want to be during the kingdom age!

The carnal Christian, who lives in his sins without confession and repentance, will not have a PART in the first resurrection to reign with Christ for the thousand years! Rather, he can expect FIERY indignation from God.

Hebrews 10:26 For if WE sin willfully

after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but **ascertain fearful expectation of judgment, and FIERY INDIGNATION** which will devour the adversaries.

The apostle John makes the comparison incredibly clear. He tells us that the one who overcomes shall inherit all things as a Son in the kingdom age. On the other hand, those who do not overcome will be punished **temporarily** with the second death in the lake of fire.

Revelation 21:7-8 He that **overcometh** shall inherit all things

; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. 8 But (in contrast) the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars (the non-overcomers that were disqualified), shall have their **PART in** (this word is defined in Rev.20:6, "he hath part in" a thousand years?) the lake which burneth with **FIRE** and brimstone: which is the second death.

To have a part in the lake of fire may be how John the Baptist described Jesus' future ministry - that He would baptize in FIRE in Luke 3:16. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus Christ when he warned the churches about the second death!

Revelation 2:11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith **unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.**

How long will be their PART in lake of fire, in Revelation 21:8? John defines for us the duration of their part in the lake of fire in Revelation 20:6.

Revelation 20:6 Blessed and holy is he that hath **PART in**

the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him **A THOUSAND YEARS.**

The unfaithful Christian's "PART in" the lake of fire will be for "A THOUSAND YEARS!" It is a temporary punishment, not eternal. A part is only a portion of something but it is not the whole thing. Their part in the lake of fire does not extend beyond a definite period of time (a thousand years). Nevertheless, I am sure for those that experience this terrible future it will feel like eternity. To be a Christian and suffer the "hurt of the second death" (Rev .2:11) in the lake of fire is what Paul describes as being "saved THROUGH fire."

1 Corinthians 3:15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as **THROUGH FIRE.**

This is why Christians need to set their focus on the future crown. Athletes in this world do everything they can by hard training and strict discipline to win a crown that perishes with time. How much more should we as Christians train our bodies to obey the commands of God in view of a crown that is imperishable?

1 Corinthians 9:25 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**. 26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. 27 But I **discipline my body and bring it into subjection**, lest, when I have preached to others, **I myself should become disqualified**.

Let us run the race with patience as Jesus Christ did leaving us an example!

Hebrews 12:1-2

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**,² 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**.

The joy set before Jesus was to sit down at the right hand of the throne of God. It was that joy that made it possible for him to endure the cross. Not just once at Calvary but all through His life. Throughout His life He endured the cross by dying to self. He gained His position at the right hand of the throne of God by overcoming the many obstacles of this present age.

Revelation 3:21 "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

As overcoming Christians, let us press on to continue to run the race, fearing the judgment of fire and yet looking forward to the joy of being crowned, even until the end when we hear from our Lord's lips: "Well done thou good and faithful servant."