

REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : SUNDAY 17 MARCH 2013 MORNING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 119:11

Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Psalm 103:9

Confession of faith: Apostolic

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.
And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into Hell, the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, a holy universal Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting

Amen.

After the reading of the Law we confess our guilt and pray for forgiveness and a new life before God with Psalm 25:5

Law

Psalm: 25:5

Prayer:

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation of the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

Amen

Psalm 144:1

Scripture reading: 1 Corinthians 9:15-27

Scripture text: 1 Corinthians 9:26

Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.

(1 Corinthians 9:26)

In our verse of text Paul writes about an athlete and a boxer. Somebody who partakes in a race, running to come first and somebody boxing with his fists to flatten his opponent.

And this image he uses is clear and to the point. He writes this letter to the Greeks living in Corinth and they are besotted on sport. They regularly attend the big athletic events and know exactly what a boxer and athlete does.

But this image does not only address the church of Corinth, it is also relevant to us. We also live in a time where everybody is besotted on sports. If we ourselves do not partake in a sport then at least we are enthusiasts regularly attending sport events like rugby or cricket as spectators.

Paul says that the believer is like a sportsman. A sportsman runs to be awarded a prize. The believer also runs to get a prize: the prize is eternal life. As such must a Christian live: like somebody running to be the first to cross the finishing line. A life wherein we must run with great dedication and concentration for the Kingdom of God. In our lives we must use the last morsel of our power to be Christians.

This was lacking with the congregation of the church in Corinth. Their spiritual lives were in danger because they lived loosely. Therefore in aid of changing their life styles Paul warns them with images of sportsmen.

The apostle Paul is very concerned about this matter and therefore he further builds out the image in verse 25. He teaches that an athlete withholds himself from everything. Here it deals with the training. An athlete does not do just anything. He takes care to avoid matters that could tire him and cost him the first prize. And, says Paul, the athlete does all this in order of receiving a perishable crown. The Greek athlete did his best to receive a crown of laurel branches as the first prize. But in the race of the Christian there is an imperishable crown that does not wither when plucked from the tree. The Christian that perseveres in the race receives the imperishable crown of the Kingdom of God. In verse 26 Paul puts his own life as an example to the Corinthians.

He runs in the race of the Christian faith and life in such a way that it is clear to everybody what he is doing. In his race he only runs for one matter: He runs with dedication to receive the prize of God. He also is not a boxer who misses. He intends flattening his opponent to the ground.

In verse 27 Paul writes that he disciplines and brings his body into subjection. It still deals with training and exercise. Training is not easy to any athlete. An athlete does not just train when he feels like it. Proper training is a hard discipline because when the athlete trains he continually asks more from his body than what it can give. Paul writes that in this same way he trains to be a Christian. He does not pray only when he feels like it. He does not only exercise his faith when his temperament is in favour of it. Like an athlete he painfully trains daily in his Christianity so that he is fit in the faith.

And here Paul is not referring to self-chastising. He is referring to the battle of the Christian against the sin. The race the Christian has to run out under the attack of the devil. Paul says that we must make ourselves serviceable. That means that each one of us must be spiritually fit to engage in a race or fistfight with the devil and that we must be schooled well in our faith so that we, not only can run away from the devil, but can also flatten him. We must get the prize from God and the devil must not be able to prevent us from getting it.

In his letters Paul often refers to athletics. He writes to Timothy that he is partaking in the good race, finishing the race and retaining the faith **7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.** (2 Timothy 4:7, 8.)

Beloved, are we dedicated in our spiritual training? The following words are recorded in Hebrews 5:14:

But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

In the Greek text it is written that those who regularly practice gymnastics have the spiritual capabilities.

In our translation of 1 Timothy 4:7,8 it is written:

7 But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness.

8 For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

The Greek puts it this way:

Make yourself into a gymnast in the godliness because physical gymnastics is useful – but in a lesser degree; the godliness is indeed useful for everything.

This verse is so important because here we get our God-given advice about our Christian life of faith. The physical gymnastics is only relevant to this life. Therefore it is of lesser importance. But the spiritual gymnastics is very important. It brings you into heaven. When you exercise your faith-life then you learn about the promises and about the closeness of God. Therefore it is written that it is important to the temporary and eternal life.

Beloved, who of us are fit gymnasts? Who of us are in his spirit truly a prophet and child of the Lord? Who of our lives in our bedrooms are right to the Father? None of us, because we are not fit gymnasts of the Holy Spirit. The spirit of very few of us is so fit in the faith that we continually think about the Lord and His Council. We pretend as if our faith is like a rugby match: Sundays we go and look at the game. We look at the spiritual gymnastics of other people. We ourselves rather remain sitting in the pavilion because should we in life have to run or fight we, because we are so very unfit, will fall out and be flattened by the sin and the satan.

In Hebrews 5:12 –14 it is written that we all should be teachers against these times, but we still have to drink milk in stead of eating solid food. We have to eat infant food on the life of faith because we are still to unfit to already eat solid food. And Paul says that it is because we do not exercise out of habit – take note of verse 14.

12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

In other words should you want adult spiritual abilities you must exercise that what you have so that it can become strong. We must become spiritually game fit.

Many of us are of the opinion that we can conduct our worshipping just as we like. Some of us think that church and worshipping is only for Sundays. Other members believe it to be the task of the reverend to pray for their sakes and in their name and that he would be to blame should they themselves be too filled with sin to attend church on Sundays.

Beloved, the Lord Himself tells you to run and fight. One athlete cannot run for another because everyone runs for himself.

When we discover that we do not feel like attending church or not feel like having home worshipping in the evening or not feel like praying then you must pray even more! Then you are in danger! Then you have become unfit for the Lord's competition! Then you have missed the strike and the devil has flattened you!

Beloved, should this be the case that you are not a child of God then you also will not receive the crown of God. Then you must pray like never before because you now need it more than before in your life. Then you must especially read pray and attend church to break the habit of weakening in faith!

Soon we will celebrate the Holy Supper. It is the feast of the death of Christ. The feast of our salvation. And beloved, the Holy Supper does not only tell you that Jesus Christ saves you and that you can now relax and do nothing. The Holy Supper teaches that Christ's earnings enable you to run the race through the help of the Holy Spirit. It renews your obligation to remain spiritually fit – now more than ever before because Christ has died. God no longer promises

salvation and redemption, He has already granted it in Jesus Christ and He has already sent God the Spirit back to us. How much more do we now need to fight. We must just listen to the voice of God in our innards.

Or are we spiritually unfit? So unfit spiritually that during Holy Communion we are going to eat and drink a judgement over ourselves because we resist the Holy Spirit within us? Unfit because we refuse fighting the battle for God?

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Scripture Versification 18-7:1, 12

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give peace.

Amen

Dr MJ Du Plessis
Helping Reverend
Reformed Church Clanwilliam
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