

Sports Analogies in the New Testament

The NFL Super Bowl this year is scheduled for February 9th, 2025. This brings sports to the forefront of many people's thinking, and even if one is not interested in football, this upcoming event, as well as others, cannot be avoided in our society, TV ads and news, maybe in our social circle, etc. This being true, it may be a fit time to consider, "Sports Analogies in the NT."

The people to whom the NT letters were written live at a time and in a society where sports were widely engaged in. Maybe the most celebrated was the Olympic Games, held every four years in honor of Zeus. Some of the sports engaged in were foot races, chariot racing, wrestling, boxing, spear throwing. For the contestants, there may be strict rules, e.g., diet, which may begin at home, then thirty days before the event they may reside at one place under constant supervision; exercise regularly and vigorously; and certainly, obey all the rules of the game. Prizes were in different forms, such as a wreath made of leaves from the sacred olive tree.

The Holy Spirit saw fit to allow and empower New Testament prophets to use sports analogies in their letters. In learning from these analogies, we must restrict ourselves to the points being made by the writer—we are not at liberty to construct our own lessons that are based on extensions of the analogies. If we wish to construct analogies for teaching purposes, that is okay, but we should make it clear they are *our* analogies and not Divine Scripture analogies. Let's address ourselves to learn the lessons the inspired writers made from sports analogies under the supervision of the Holy Spirit.

1. 1Co 9:24-27

- a. What two sports does Paul draw analogies from?
- b. What *attitudes/actions* is he encouraging by the following phrases?
 - "only one receives the prize"
 - "exercises self-control in all things"
 - "in such a way"
 - "disciple...so that"

2. Heb 12:1-2

- a. What sport does the writer draw his analogy from?
- b. What *attitudes/actions* is he encouraging by the following phrases?
 - "have so great a cloud of witnesses"
 - "lay aside every encumbrance"
 - "run with endurance"

3. 1Tim 4:7

- a. What *attitudes/actions* is he encouraging by referencing "bodily exercise" (NKJV)?

4. 2Tim 2:5

- a. What *attitudes/actions* is he encouraging by "if anyone competes as an athlete"?

5. Php 1:27

- a. "striving together" NAS95 (striving side by side" ESV) translate a word that means "athletes acting in concert" or as a "team."
- b. What *attitudes/actions* is he encouraging by using this analogy?