

PARTICIPATION AWARDS

1 Corinthians 9:24 ... “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.”

In today's verse, Paul uses a sports analogy to teach about persevering against the challenges of life. For us the finish line is to serve God faithfully and the prize is heaven. Paul spent much time in Greece, the birthplace of the Olympics, so he was familiar with athletic events. Until just recently, the practice in competitions of any sort, was to give the prize to the winner, and the winner alone. Somewhere along the line, someone felt badly about giving prizes only to the winners, so it became popular to give lesser prizes to second-place, and third-place winners. A generation or so later, that practice was expanded to include fourth and fifth placers.

Today, many events give participation awards; you get an award for just showing up, whether you compete and do your best or not. This happens with children's events, with employees, with government workers and more. In some school districts, all teachers are given recognition awards at the end of the school year, even though they were already paid for doing their jobs, and even if they did nothing extraordinary or were even absent much of the time. The practice of giving participation awards removes all incentive for people to do their best. There is no longer any prize to be pursued, because there is the assurance of recognition for just showing up.

There are no participation awards in God's kingdom. You do not get to go to heaven for just attending church if you are not born-again. You do not earn your mansion in heaven by doing charitable work if you are not born-again. You cannot earn God's favor by claiming to be a Christian while living like the devil. There is only one prize that everyone who runs the race of life according to God's plan, can earn. There can be multiple first-prize winners, but there are no second-place, or third-place winners. You will not enter heaven by showing God your participation award.

Living for God and according to his plan, is an intentional act. You must think about it, pray about it, and follow through. You cannot get a prize for treating your spiritual life like a hobby or social experience. You must train for your service to God, and you must WIN to earn the only prize available: heaven.

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