

July 10, 2018

Dear Members, Co-Workers and Friends:

What does it take to be first? It's not easy. It's challenging. It requires a lot of patience, learning, zeal, diligence, persistence, steadfastness, and willpower. As the saying goes, "Practice makes perfect!" Let us focus a moment on the FIFA World Cup of "soccer" or "football." For one month, 32 countries battle it out to become the champions of the world, and in the end, one team is declared victorious. But to even make it into the group of 32, each team had to get through the qualification games first, which consisted of several games against other countries. Since the World Cup takes place every 4 years, a lot of preparation is required, along with pressure, since each team's goal is to claim the prize by holding the trophy in the Championship game and making their country proud, which is why the World Cup of soccer is considered the most popular tournament in the world, as a single sport.

With this analogy, do we, if converted, have the desire to be first in the spiritual context? Since those of us who have been called by God and have been baptized are considered firstfruits, we have already been qualified as begotten children of God, thereby receiving the first opportunity to be in God's Kingdom. There is, however, no guarantee that we will claim the prize as patience, learning, zeal, diligence, persistence, steadfastness and willpower are required, for "he who endures to the END shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13).

This road that we travel on is not an easy one, for it is long and difficult, and only those who are worthy enough to keep going on it until the end will succeed. Obstacles will get in the way from time to time but we can't let that deter us from our ultimate goal. We have to BELIEVE and have to have the FAITH that we will make it because once doubt enters into our minds and isn't controlled, we will have a difficult time holding on and ultimately we may quit and lose our potential to obtain that crown.

In Luke 13:24, Christ tells us that we must "strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able." To strive for something means that we must do our best by putting our effort into it, and in this case, we must do it continuously. There have been those in the Church of God who didn't strive enough, even though they may have understood the Truth, but they weren't strong enough and willing to keep going on and they just simply gave up. Sadly, this devastating development is continuing today and it will get much worse before the Day of Christ's return has arrived.

We read in 2 Timothy 3:14-15, "But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." If we have that belief inside us, then we should be able to accomplish what it is that we have been destined to fulfill.

With the Fall or Autumn Holy Days less than two months away, are we getting mentally prepared for what these days picture? Are we ready for a new world? Are we ready for Christ's return? Are we ready to be first? The immediate future looks grim as far as this physical world is concerned and also in regard to biblical prophecies about what the Churches of God are facing. As we say over and over again and as the Bible reveals, a falling away from the Truth within the Church of God is still going to take place before Christ's return (2 Thessalonians 2:3). All of us in the Body of Christ are running


that same race, but not everyone who runs it will finish successfully. However, no one has to fall away. If they do, it is their fault; nobody else's.

Paul explains how he had to run this race, which is the same one we are all running today. In 1 Corinthians 9:24, he asks the question, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize?" He follows up with his answer, "Run in such a way that you may obtain it. 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. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified (verses 24-27)." We need to make sure that we "run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1).

Paul became victorious in his race. He ended it with success: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 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).

This is the same race we all run. If we want to become perfect, we need to strive for it. The finish line is before us and we have the first opportunity to claim our prize. It's right there, we just need to keep going!

In God's service and with brotherly love,



Michael Link