

YOU CAN'T WIN UNLESS YOU FINISH
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The scriptures make it clear it is our spiritual condition at the time of death that determines our destination, not a single act done at some point in the past. We must finish the race still living for God.

Even after receiving salvation, we are expected to live for and serve God in this life. Acts 1:8 contains commands for how the disciples of Jesus were to spend their time after they received His Spirit. Mark 16:17 spoke of signs that would follow them. "Follow" indicates acts occurring after and as a result of the choice to believe. God used signs to confirm the presence of the gift He had placed in His people in Hebrews 2:3. It was through power in their ongoing lives that those around them could tell they had been changed. James was pretty blunt when he stated faith unaccompanied by works is dead. No one whose life does not demonstrate the power of God can realistically claim to have life in Christ. Fruits of the Spirit occur naturally if we are connected to the vine. John 1:12 tells us those who receive God, who take Him when offered as a gift, receive power, even those who believe on His name. The words "are led" in Romans 8:14 refer to our ongoing transformation into sons of God.

To finish the race strong, it helps to consider that it is hard to live for God easy, but it sure is easy to live for God hard. We must hold tight to salvation to retain it. 2 Corinthians instructs us to separate ourselves from anything or anyone unclean before God. This scripture indicates a refusal to do so results in our rejection by God. In Matthew 7:22-23, many who had done mighty works, and professed to know God, were rejected because their works contained iniquity. It is not enough to profess a relationship; our lives must reflect our submission to God. Romans 6:15 is a clear warning not to mistake grace for a license to sin. In John 5:14, Jesus warned a man He had just healed to remain free from sin or something worse might happen to him than what he had been healed from. In John 8:11, He once again linked being forgiven to remaining free from sin. These recipients of grace were told to "turn away," or repent from sin, and stay away from it. The tenth chapter of Hebrews sums it up nicely. If we sin willfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins. There is no longer a covering of blood or an atonement to cover our guilt. If those who broke the Law of Moses paid with their lives, we can expect to be judged just as harshly if we have "trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace." We are promised that willful sin after being redeemed will lead to wrath and severely judgment.

Professing to know Christ is not enough. Just ask those who unfortunate pretenders referenced in Acts 19:15. We learn from 1 Peter 4:18 that having received power once, and becoming righteous once, is no guarantee of salvation. Even those who are trying to be righteous will have difficulty being saved. Our "fruit" is what is produced in our lives. Jesus said in Matthew, "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit." Whatever kind of fruit people see when they look at us indicates the kind of tree we really are. While we are not to judge one another, identifying fruit is more a matter of observation than judgment. Whether we like it or not, we are and will be judged by what we do. In Revelation 20:12-13, God judges everyone, "according to their works." What we are doing when we fall determines our end, not whether we benefited from grace at one point. If righteousness cannot be lost, there would have been no need in Job 27:6 for Job to have held fast to it. Paul instructed us in Hebrews 10:23 to also "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering." Perhaps most important, we were told to hold tight to what we have by God in Revelation 3:11, so no one could take our crown from us. How interesting that others can cause us to lose our God appointed positions as a ruler with Him.

My wife's grandmother used to say, "It's a good life, if you don't weaken." We don't need to be first to get a prize, we just need to finish. Since we have no idea, according to James 4:14, exactly when we will cross our particular finish line, it makes sense to just keep running. Is there a prize worth running for? Oh yeah! In fact, in John 14:2-3, there are many of them mentioned. Not everyone will be cheering for us. Jesus said, "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved."

He would not have said this unless some will not finish or endure to the end. He said in Matthew 8:36 there is not enough profit for a man, if he gained the world but lost his soul. Apparently, some will forfeit the race to follow other sports, forgetting the temporary nature of those prizes. When we get to the end of our race, we want to hear, not the cheer of the crowd, but the words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." Even those who barely finish will be well rewarded. It just matters that we finish. I like what a weary Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:6-8. "... the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: 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." He knew that regardless of the pain during the race, all is well that ends well.