

## Competing According to The Rules

For the last two weeks, the Winter Olympics have been going on. I admit to watching a little of the competition but not as much as I usually watch. One day I thought about the controversies surrounding these Olympics. The games being held in China, a communist Country, who are accused of genocide, and the athletes are warned of the dangers they may face. The doping controversy involving a Russian ice skater, fifteen-year-old Kamila Valieva, who is able to make jumps no one else seems to be able to do. However, she failed a drug test, having a banned heart medication in her body. The Olympic committee basically punted, saying they will allow her to compete and make a formal ruling later. This means the medals she won or could win will not be awarded until later. Then to make matters worse she fell twice in the figure skating finals, finishing fourth. Kamila was the overwhelming favorite and was visually crushed by her performance. Leaving the ice, her coach tore into her, blaming Valieva for quitting and not trying to win. Finally, another Russian figure skater, Alexandria Trusova age 17, skated a clean program but finished second in the competition. She was upset and could be heard saying how much she hated skating and seemed to say she would never skate again.

Let me make a few personal observations before getting into the spiritual application of this article. I am sure there are good stories from these Olympics, such as those who were happy to just be there. One speed skater actually allowed a competitor to cut in front of him, thereby helping the other to win. But these games seem to reflect a sad time in our world. A time good sportsmanship, and common decency has disappeared. I do feel sorry for the 15-year-old skater due to her circumstances. She is the product of a system where there is tremendous pressure to win and individual liberty is not valued. Did she know about the banned drug or did she simply do what she was told to? Finally, I see the double standard when the NBA remains quiet about the human rights abuses in China due to the millions they are making in that market. Only a few NBA players have spoken out on this issue and one is no longer in the league. It appears the NBA values the mighty dollar over human lives. Don't lecture me about injustice in our country when you are in union with China.

This reminds me of what Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 2, "You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. And also. if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he

competes according to the rules.” (2 Timothy 2:3-5). We understand each game, or competition has rules. Basketball has rules unique for that game, likewise with football, gold, and even curling. For one to win, they must know the rules, which means to study and learn them. Then they must abide by those rules in order to win. Violating the rules should result in disqualification or some type of penalty. These rules ensure fair competition in which everyone has an equal chance to at least try and win. When the rules are not applied fairly then the game breaks down and people feel cheated.

This applies in the spiritual realm also as there is the Law of Christ. This “law” is called “the law of liberty” (James 1.25); the Law of the Spirit of life which has set us free from the law of sin and death” Romans 8.2), or simply the New Covenant in Hebrews. The idea is this law is good for it frees us from the law of Moses and from sin. Therefore, it is important for us to know the Law of Christ as it will judge us on the last day. “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him--the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.” (John 12:48). The athlete does not determine the rules but competes according to the rules.

We are in a spiritual competition where the reward, or victory is heaven and failure is hell. Our main adversary is ourselves and controlling our desires. “For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.” (1 John 2:16-17). Unlike our sporting games where athletes are trying to outperform each other we are competing against Satan and our own sinful passions.

Finally, we are encouraged to help one another. In essence to be good sports and “stimulate one another to love and good works” (Hebrews 10.24). We can be victorious together!

Finally, unlike the Olympics which may be subject to political pressure or a game where the officials make a bad call, we know our Judge will be impartial. “For there is no partiality with God, (Romans 2:11), and just. “God is a just judge, And God is angry with the wicked every day.” (Psalms 7:11).

May you compete according to the rules and receive the crown of life at the end. –  
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