

## REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 17 OCTOBER 2010: MORNING SERVICE

**Sing before:** Psalm 128:1+3.

*Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:*

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

**Amen**

Song of praise: Psalm 68:9

**Confession of faith:** Apostolic

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into Hell, the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, a holy universal Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting

**Amen.**

*After the reading of the Law we sing of our reconciliation by the Lord with Psalm 31:15*

Law

Psalm: 31:15

**Prayer:**

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation for the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises.**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

**Amen**

Hymn 5-3:1+4+5

**Scripture reading:** 1 Corinthians 9.

**Text:** 1 Corinthians 9:26:

**“Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.”**

In our text Paul writes of a runner and a boxer.

- In a race you run to win.
- In a boxing match you intend to knock your opponent down.

Paul's image is clear:

- He writes to the Greeks living in Corinth who know the Olympic games.
- They attend the games and know what a runner and a boxer do.

The image is clear not only to the people in Corinth. It is clear to us too.

- We also live in days when sport is very popular.
- If we do not participate ourselves, we are enthusiasts who watch sport regularly, rugby or cricket.

Paul says that the true believer is like an athlete.

- An athlete runs win the prize.
- The true believer also runs to win a prize – the prize being the life eternal.

That is how a Christian must live – like a runner running to cross the finishing line first.

- Our life is a race in which we must run focused and concentrating in order to win the kingdom of God as prize.
- We must in this life harness every grain of power we have to be Christians.

That was the difficulty with the church in Corinth – they were unable to do this.

- Their life as Christians was in jeopardy because of their slackness.
- That is why the Lord warns them with this image of athletes to change their way of life.

The apostle Paul was concerned about this matter and expands on his image in verse 25.

- He shows that the athlete goes into strict training:
  - He eats nothing that is bad for his body
  - He goes to bed early because his body needs rest
  - He is careful
  - He guards against things that might harm him and so cost him the first prize.

And, Paul adds, the athlete does all this in order to win a crown that will not last – crown of leaves that will wither!

- The Greek athlete exerted himself to win a wreath of laurel as first prize.
- But in the race the Christian runs the prize is not a wreath that will wither once it is plucked from the tree.
- The Christian who perseveres in the race receives the everlasting crown of God's kingdom.

In verse 26 Paul presents his own life as an example to the Corinthians.

- He runs and fights in the competition of the Christian faith and the Christian life in such a way that there is no doubt about what he is doing.
- In his race he runs for one thing only – he runs to win the prize God presents.
- And he is not a boxer who misses – he aims to knock his opponent down.

In verse 27 Paul writes that he beats his body – by which he means training and exercise.

- Training does not come easily to an athlete.
- He cannot practise only when he feels like it.
- Hard practice means suffering, for the athlete who trains hard pushes his body to the limits of its ability.

Paul writes that similarly he trains himself in being a Christian.

- He does not pray only when he feels like it
- He does not practise his faith only when it suits his temper on a particular day.
- Like an athlete he meticulously practises daily his Christianity in that he might be fit in his faith.

Paul does not speak of self-flagellation.

- He speaks of the Christian's struggle with sin.
- He means the race that the Christian runs to keep his faith and escape the devil's onslaught.

Paul says that we must render ourselves serviceable.

- That means that we must be spiritually fit, so fit that we can run a race or maintain a fight with the devil.
- Which means that we must be so well schooled in our faith that we can run away from the devil and are able to knock him down in a fight.
- We must receive the first prize from God and the devil must be unable to keep us from it.

Paul often refers to athletics in his letters.

To Timothy he writes that he has fought the good fight, finished the race and kept his faith: 2 Timothy 4:7-8:

**“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearance.”**

The question is whether we are always serious with our spiritual training? In Hebrews 5:14 we read: **“But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”**

In the Greek text the words used say that they who regularly do gymnastics have the spiritual powers.

In our translation we read in 1Timothy 4:7-8:

**“Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both present life and the life to come.”**

Listen again to the important words:

***“...train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both present life and the life to come.”***

The Greek wording is:

***Make yourself a gymnast in godliness, for physical gymnastics is useful – but to a lesser extent; godliness, however, is useful for everything.***

This passage is so important – because here we receive God-given advice about our Christian life of faith.

- Physical gymnastics applies only to this life – it keeps you fit on this side of the grave. That is all. Therefore it is of lesser value.
- But the spiritual gymnastics is very important.
  - It serves you until heaven
  - If you train your life of faith you learn of the promises and the nearness of God.
  - That is why it is written that it is of value for this life and the life hereafter.

Which of us are fit spiritual gymnasts? Which one of us is in his spirit truly a prophet and a child of the Lord? Of which of us is the life of prayer in every respect acceptable to the Father?

- Not one, because we are not fit gymnasts of the Holy Spirit.
- Few of us are spiritually so fit in faith that we always think of the Lord and His Counsel.
- We treat our worship like a rugby match:
  - On Sunday we go to watch the match
  - We observe the spiritual gymnastics of other people
  - We prefer to remain seated in the stands because, should we in life be required to run and to fight, we would fall out and be knocked out by sin and the devil because we are so unfit.

In Hebrews 5:12-14 it is written that by this time we all ought to be teachers, but, we in fact need milk in stead of solid food!

- We must eat baby food in our spiritual life because we are too untrained to be able to digest solid food.
- The author of the epistle to the Hebrews says that it so because we fail to train constantly – see verse 14.

In other words, if you would have mature spiritual powers you must train those you have so that they become strong. We must become spiritually fit for the game.

Many people believe that we may practise our religion as we please.

- Some think that church and worship is limited to Sunday only.
- Others think that it is the minister's duty to pray for them and on their behalf.

The Lord tells you that you yourself must run and fight. No runner runs for another, every one runs for himself.

- When you discover that you have no desire to come to church, or no wish to worship or to pray, then you should pray so much more fervently! Then you are in danger!
- Then you have become unfit to compete in the Lord's race! Then you have hit the air in the fight and has the devil knocked you down!

If that is so, then we are spiritually untrained and we shall not receive the crown from God.

- Then we must pray and fight as never before, for then we need it more than ever in our life.
- It is then that we must read and pray and attend church to break the habit of weakening in faith.
- The Bible tells us: pray unceasingly!

This morning you, young people, will all confess your faith to God Himself. We, as congregation, are simply the witnesses to that which you confess to God.

- The confession you make, has as its content the fact that you know and believe that you are saved by Jesus Christ the Lord.
- You have recently completed your tuition and the knowledge is still fresh but that does not mean that you can relax.
- After your confession you leave the church as people mature in faith. That means that as a confessed member of the church of God you will through the merit of the Lord Jesus Christ be enabled to run the race of faith with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- If you want to stand up to the devil you will daily need to do your duty to remain spiritually fit.
- You will discover that you need to do it now more than ever because now that you have achieved spiritual maturity the devil will trouble you more and more.
- Everybody who confesses that the Lord Jesus Christ died for the atonement of all our sins is a threat to the devil. He attacks them and tries to weaken their power until they drop.

Now the comfort you may carry with you:

- God does not only promise salvation and deliverance.
- He has already given it in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- He has also already sent us God the Holy Spirit.

Go and live in the power of the salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ's redemption until He returns on the clouds. Heed the voice of God the Holy Spirit in you heart.

**Amen**

Closing prayer.

Closing song: Psalm 118:12

Public confession of faith by Michelle Aucamp, Yolande Briel, Christoffel Groenewald, Suanne Mulder, Lisa Opperman, Diederik van der Eems, Shaun van der Walt.

Hymn 19-1:1

Baptism of Shaun van der Walt.

Hymn 1-1:1

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**Amen.**

**Dr MJ Du Plessis**  
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**Scripture: New International Version.**