

2 Timothy 2:5

ESV

An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

NASB

Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules.

NIV

Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules.

KJV

And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.

I. History

Gregory of Nyssa (335–394): For we are not ashamed to confess that we have prepared for our contest no weapon of argument sharpened by rhetoric, that we can bring forward to aid us in the fight with those arrayed against us, no cleverness or sharpness of dialectic.... One strength our reasoning against falsehood has—first the very Word Himself, Who is the might of our word

Ambrose (337–397): For what can be more noble than to train thy mind so as not to place a high value on riches and pleasures and honours, nor to waste all thy care on these? When thy mind is thus disposed, thou must consider how all that is virtuous and seemly must be placed before everything else; and thou must so fix thy mind upon that, that if aught happens which may break thy spirit, whether loss of property, or the reception of fewer honours, or the disparagement of unbelievers, thou mayest not feel it, as though thou wert above such things; nay, so that even dangers which menace thy safety, if undertaken at the call of justice, may not trouble thee. This is the true fortitude which Christ's warrior has, who receives not the crown unless he strives lawfully.

John Calvin (1509–1564): Thus, because Christ wishes us to strive during our whole life, he who gives way in the middle of the course deprives himself of honor, even though he may have begun valiantly. To *strive lawfully* is to pursue the contest in such a manner and to such an extent as the law requires, that none may leave off before the time appointed.

II. Also if anyone competes as an athlete

What is an athlete (Training to be in Godliness 1 Tim. 4:7)  
anyone: this word generalizes this to all, not just pastors

IV. unless he competes according to the rules

This can mean either according to the rules (during the contest)  
or preparing properly. It was required to agree to 10 months of preparation  
before the games.

III. He does not win the prize

4:8 crown of righteousness; our inheritance in heaven