



Obeying the Ultimate Authority: An Olympic Illustration

by Edd Sterchi

*All Scriptures and comments are based on the **New King James Version**, unless otherwise noted.*

In the 2010 Winter Olympics Sven Kramer of the Netherlands was leading the 10,000 meter speed skating race by a wide margin. He was a sure lock to win the gold medal. But with a couple of laps to go, he failed to switch lanes. According to the Olympic speed skating rules, lanes are to be changed by the speed skaters each lap on the backstretch, alternating inside and outside to balance the distance covered.

How could this egregious error happen, especially with a seasoned skater who had already won a gold medal in the 5,000 meter race and was the current world record holder in both the 5,000 and 10,000 meter distances? It happened because he listened to an authority figure – his coach, Gerard Kemkers. On each lap, Kemkers had written on a board how much Kramer was ahead of the man in second place. On the fateful lap, Kemkers said, he simply lost track of the lane switches. A confused Kemkers shouted at Kramer to switch to the inner lane when, in fact, he was exactly where he should have been, on the outside.

Although Kramer finished the race in Olympic record time, he was disqualified because of the illegal lane change. The amateurish blunder could have been blamed on his coach but, in the end, Kramer admitted that the ultimate fault lay with him. "It is pretty hard now," Kramer said. "I was on my way to make the right decision and right before the corner, I changed my decision because of the advice from my coach. At the end of the day, it is my responsibility. I am the skater on the ice. I have to do it."

A very important analogy concerning obeying authority can be made from this incident. We are to obey authority figures as long as they give advice that agrees with the "ultimate authority." Mr. Kramer knew the Olympic rules, and following his coach, an authority figure, didn't make it right if he broke those rules.

In like manner, many sincere people today are following authority figures in religion who are giving them advice, but it is not totally based upon the official rule book: the Bible. It is sad to note that they will not win the race that leads to heaven.

Paul commented to the Christians in the area of Galatia,

You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? (**Galatians 5:7**)

You see, they had been obeying the pure gospel of Christ, but then deviated from it by listening to false teachers who had distorted the gospel truth (**cf. Galatians 1:6-9**). In this state, they had fallen from grace (**Galatians 5:4**). Paul's remedy for them was to stand firmly upon the gospel (**Galatians 5:1**). The same is true for us today. It is imperative that we know and stand upon what the ultimate authority says concerning our lives. Our receiving the gold (i.e. the city of gold, **cf. Revelation 21:18**) depends upon it.

—-- *Edd Sterchi, February 4, 2022*