TRANSLATING METAPHOR

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Category: Bible Translation

Doug has a very interesting post on the difficulties of translating metaphors. Taking a hard look at this passage:

> *24 Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. 25 Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. 26 So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; 27 but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NRSV)*

He goes on to say:

> *The passage is replete with metaphors drawn from the experience of (especially) the Isthmian games which Paul may have experienced first hand. The use to which he puts them is loose enough to invite caution. He is clearly not intending to suggest that only one person can achieve salvation. The passage as a whole suggests that his emphasis is on training rather than competing, and the key idea controlling the later metaphors is that â€œathletes exercise self-controlâ€ . The exercises described in vv26-27 are, it seems to me, best understood as part of the gymnasium training package. That is part of what makes the passage so interesting. Paul shows no sign of discomfort with the imagery of the gym, but seems at ease in the culture. (The other part of what makes it interesting, of course, is the immediacy of this kind of imagery for todayâ€™s fitness-obsessed society of largely unfit people.)* read more.

Doug goes on to suggest an alternative translation for these verses which might strike you as odd at first glance, but read back through his reasoning. When you grasp what Doug is saying, you will see that what he has suggested brings out the meaning of Paul's writing very clearly.

Translating metaphors (picture language if you like) is one of the hardest features of Bible translation and this is a great example of how it can be done.