

Letters From My Father
Week 24
2 Timothy 2:1-8
“Distractions”

Introduction

I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me. **Galatians 2:20**

Have you ever been sitting alone attempting to pray and study your *Bible*, when all of a sudden it seems like everything in the universe is trying to distract you? The phone rings, the kids break into an argument, the alarm goes off on the clothes dryer, etc. Everything was quiet and peaceful when you started, but as soon as you try and give your full attention to your devotions, it seems like everything falls apart. Why is that, I wonder? Answer: Because, when you are seeking after the things of God, my friends, you are engaging in spiritual warfare. Welcome to the battlefield!

Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. For this reason take up the full armor of God so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand.

Ephesians 6:11-13

And if you think it gets bad when you are just trying to study and pray, imagine how intense the battle becomes when you try and win souls to Christ. Our adversary not only wants Believers to be weak and helpless in our faith, but he desperately wants non-believers to remain lost in their sins. So he attacks us upon every front. This is why Paul commanded Timothy to **“be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:1)**. For, if we are to survive this battle, it will require us to go out and fight clothed in the full armor of God. Remember Paul’s powerful words to his son in the faith:

Therefore, I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a Spirit of fear (cowardice), but one of power, love, and sound judgement. **2 Timothy 1:6-7** (clarification added)

The only way that we can be strong and courageous in the face of such opposition is to daily go out in the power of The Holy Spirit of God. This is what it means to be clothed in the armor of God, and to do this, we must be in a continual state of prayer and the effectual study of God’s Word. To try and measure up without this power would be futile.

As Paul wrote this, his final letter to Timothy from the Mamertine Prison, he urged his young protegee to stand firm in the faith, in spite of Nero’s brutal persecution of the faithful. This was not the time to back down, but rather, to double down. This battle must be won at all cost, for there are lives at stake. We too must not shrink back from the battle field, but rather, we must, in these last days, struggle against the forces of darkness for all that we are worth. Our God has not given us a Spirit of cowardice.

Paul reminded Timothy (*and us*) that there are attributes required of everyone who has been called to join in this struggle, and yes, true Christianity is indeed a struggle despite what the televangelists may tell you. The Christian combatant is to stand firm in the faith that God will ultimately win the battle. And Christ Himself will reward those who do not shrink away from the fight. And he will also be ashamed of those who are ashamed of Him. So be ready to take your stand. We have been commissioned to stand in the full armor of God, having *The Duty of a Soldier, The Dedication of a Runner, and The Diligence of a Farmer*. Please allow me to explain.

The Duty of a Soldier (vs. 1-4)

You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in the concerns of civilian life; he seeks to please the commanding officer. **2 Timothy 2:1-4**

We addressed the first two verses of this passage previously, so I only repeat them here for context. Suffice to say that Paul was encouraging Timothy to stand firm in his faith in the midst of struggle and persecution. And Paul was leading by example. He had “practiced what he preached”, as it were, even to the point of death, and that is exactly what he encouraged Timothy to do as well. To follow Christ is to endure with Him until the very end. Christianity is more about how we finish the race than how we begin. The road to glory is littered with the corpses of those who failed to reach the finish line. True faith endures all. And it is to be passed along to those who will run for the next generation (**vs. 2**).

Paul continued by commanding Timothy to “**share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.**” The NASB translates this as “share in suffering with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” Although “with me” is not in the original text, it is implied due to the Greek word which Paul chose. He is, in fact, asking Timothy to enjoin with him in the suffering for the cause of Christ. It is a statement that is utterly unapologetic in nature. For Christ Himself has told us that if we choose to follow Him then we can expect suffering as a result. He died to save us, and if the world hates him, it will hate those who follow Him as well (**John 15:18-19**). We do not belong to this world. We are sojourners with Christ, and as I have said before, dogs will always bark at strangers!

Paul reminded Timothy that he had a duty as a soldier of Christ, and that duty is to endure hardship and to avoid getting entangled in civilian affairs. What a powerful word picture of life in Christ. First of all, we do not shirk from our duty during times of difficulty. Those who have served in the military understand this concept completely. They have a sworn duty to run toward the battle, while all others are running away. They have made the decision to risk losing their lives for the cause of greater good. To be a soldier of Christ is to have this same mindset. As we discussed last week, we are to be loyal to the sacred entrustment (the gospel) that has been given to us. Deserters on the battlefield are never treated with anything but contempt by those who are willing to risk it all to serve.

I cannot tell you how many deserters that I have encountered on this journey of faith. It seems that every time things get a bit difficult, there are those who run away from the battle. I am reminded here of the children of Israel, who complained and lost faith as they wandered in the wilderness. When the time came to enter the promised land, they did not believe that God could give them the land, because those who lived there were giants, and as a result, they refused to push forward. Those people died in the wilderness, as the promised land lay within their reach. Why? Because they let fear destroy their faith. So when times get tough, push forward in the power of The Spirit, rather than give up at the first sign of discouragement. This is what separates the soldiers of Christ from the deserters, who perish in the wilderness.

Secondly, we are to not allow ourselves to become “entangled in civilian affairs”. This simply means that we are not to allow the things of this world to keep us from serving Christ. I cannot tell you how many people have told me over the years that they couldn’t serve Christ because of their family, or their work schedule, or their finances etc, etc. Can I tell you something today? God isn’t interested in hearing about your excuses. *He expects you to serve Him!* And if something worldly is getting in the way of your serving, then you need to cut it loose.

The word that Paul used for “*entanglements*” (*empeleko*) is a form of the very same word that the Scriptures use to describe the crown of thorns that the guards wove or entangled to place on Jesus’ head at His crucifixion. It means to “*purposefully weave something together*”. We, as Believers, often weave our lives together with the things of this world so tightly that we are unable to extricate ourselves. As a result, it is difficult to see where the world ends and we begin. But we are called to separate ourselves from the things of this world.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of The Father is not in him. 1 John 2:15

This does not mean that the soldier of Christ doesn't own a home or have a job, but what it does mean is that he will not allow the things of this world to keep him from the battlefield. A good soldier lives to please his commanding officer (**vs. 4**), and he cannot disobey an order simply because it isn't convenient. When the commander says its time to go to battle, the enlisted man can't say, "This doesn't work for me today. I have other obligations."

The word that Paul used which is translated "commanding officer" in the CSB actually would better read "the one who enlisted him". *Do you know that if you are a Believer today it is because Christ Himself chose you and enlisted you as a soldier in His army?* He is the one Who initiated the relationship (**John 6:44**). He is LORD of Armies (**Psalms 46:7; Isaiah 8:13; 14:24**). If you have confessed Him as LORD (**Romans 10:9**), then He is the Commanding Officer, Who signed you up for service. And when He commands that you take your place in the battle, to disobey that order is a dereliction of duty. As soldiers of the cross, we live only to please The Commander, Who enlisted us (**2 Corinthians 5:9**). This is our sacred trust, our duty as soldiers in His army.

The Dedication of a Runner (vs. 5)

Also, if anyone competes as an athlete, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. 2 Timothy 2:5

I actually love this analogy. Remember, Paul has repeatedly reminded Timothy to "stick to the script", as it were, by adhering to the sound doctrine that he had been taught. True converts are not made by watering down the truth of God's Word. *Cults* maybe, but not *converts*. Just as a runner cannot "cut the corner" of the race track to win a race, we cannot cheat on God's Word in order to appeal to the masses. It is quite possible that if the Christians in Paul's day had *compromised* sound teaching in order to get along with Rome, they may *not* have been persecuted. But they would *not compromise* the teachings of Christ in order to be accepted by the world. Remember what Jesus said:

If you love Me, you will keep My commands. John 14:15

The Word of God is our "rulebook", and as such, we must adhere to its teaching. God has given us sixty-six books so that we may know His will and His ways. These are the rules by which we must compete. An athlete dedicates himself to playing by the rules. It is the only way that he can win a crown, (or in this modern age a trophy or medal) for his efforts. God expects us to spread His gospel. *We cannot win the race by altering the message.* Simple as that. This is why Paul reminded Timothy once again to stick to the script.

Hold on to the pattern (outline or script) of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 1:13 (clarification added)

In Paul's day, athletes received a winners crown (stephanos) only if they were victorious by competing by the rules of competition. This crown was made of ivy leaves woven together and placed upon the winners head, much like the custom of a gold medal in the Olympics today. If we, as Christians, are to run our race effectively and receive a winners crown, then we must compete according to the rules of Scripture. Sound doctrine wins the race. We may win less converts, but those who are won will be genuine Believers. We must dedicate ourselves to The Scriptures, just as an athlete is dedicated to the rules of their chosen sporting profession.

The Diligence of a Farmer (vs. 6-8)

The hardworking farmer ought to be the first to get a share of the crops. Consider what I say, for The LORD will give you understanding in everything. Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead and descended from David, according to my gospel... 2 Timothy 2:6-8

Paul's third example of faithful Christian service invokes the image of the diligent farmer working toward the harvest. Farming is one of the most difficult occupations on the planet! The farmer rises early each morning, putting in untold hours of hard labor with his day rarely ending before sunset. There is plowing, planting, weeding, fertilizing, watering and the list goes on. The "hardworking farmer", as Paul describes him, doesn't see a single reward for his labor until he brings in the harvest. There are no weekly paychecks to sustain him, everything that he hopes for as a return on his investment of time and labor is contingent upon the harvest that will come at the end of the growing season.

What a superb example of the laboring servant of Christ. We toil in the fields day after day, facing hardship after hardship, but at harvest time, we long to be rewarded by our Master for our efforts. I can only imagine what it will be like to hear him say, **"Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your Master's joy!" (Matthew 25:23)**. For you see, our joy, our reward, just like the hardworking farmers' will come at harvest time, when God calls His servants home. What a glorious day that will be!

Paul wanted his son in the faith to **endure** all the hardships that accompany the faithful service of The LORD, in order that he receive the reward that was due him. But in order to be there at harvest time, Timothy would also need to put in the diligent work of a true Believer. This was not the time for the cowardly shirking of his responsibility. This was the time to work and to keep on working until Christ returned or death took him. This same charge is given to all who claim the Name above all names. *If you go around saying you love Jesus, sooner or later, you will get the opportunity to prove it.*

Paul told Timothy to prayerfully consider his words and allow The Spirit to give him the insight he needed to understand. And then, he directed his attention to Christ, the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith (**Hebrews 12:1-3**). It is He, Who has completed the difficult portion of all that we are to become in Him (**2 Timothy 1:10**). This is why He could say, **"It is finished"** upon the cross. For He died and rose from the dead to defeat death, hell, and the grave. And in like manner, He will also see to it that we fulfill our sacred entrustment. Or as Paul would say:

...I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to guard what has been entrusted to me until that day. 2 Timothy 1:12b

So do not give up. Yes the battle rages, but we are promised the victory, if we serve with *the duty of a soldier, the dedication of an athlete, and the diligence of a hard working farmer*. God will see to it that our entrustment shall be guarded, so that we receive our reward at harvest time. So....

Let us not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don't give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to God's household of faith. Galatians 6:9-10

and let the soldiers, runners, and farmers all say... TRUTH!!!