

The Elements of a Strong Spiritual Life, Part 2

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:3–7

Code: 55-6

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Promise of Empowerment

1. Acts 1:8

Jesus said to His disciples, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. "

2. Luke 24:49

He promised, "You [will be] clothed with power from on high. "

3. Ephesians 3:20

God "is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us. "

B. The Reminder About Our Resources

When we forget our spiritual resources and rely on our own strength, we'll experience discouragement, weariness, and disillusionment. Spiritual warfare is hard and never stops. Timothy, like us all, needed to be reminded of the source of spiritual strength. Scripture records many such reminders.

1. Joshua 1:6-7

God said to Joshua, "Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. "

2. 1 Chronicles 22:13

David said to his son Solomon, "You shall prosper, if you are careful to observe the statutes and the ordinances which the Lord commanded Moses concerning Israel. Be strong and courageous, do not fear nor be dismayed. "

3. 1 Corinthians 16:13

Paul exhorted the Corinthians to "be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. "

4. Galatians 4:19

Paul spoke to the Galatians as those "with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you. "

He wanted them to be fully like Christ: strong, mature, and powerful (cf. Eph. 4:13) .

5. Colossians 1:28

Paul proclaimed Christ, "admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. " To be complete in Christ is to be strong spiritually.

6. Ephesians 6:10

Believers are to "be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. "

Review

II. THE EXHORTATION (v. 1)

"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. "

III. THE ILLUSTRATIONS (vv. 2-6)

A. A Teacher (v. 2)

"The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. "

Lesson

The next three illustrations are a series of metaphors.

B. A Soldier (vv. 3-4)

"Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. "

1. He knows he's at war

Paul likened the Christian to a soldier. That implies we are at war--a picture used elsewhere in Scripture.

a) Ephesians 6:11-12

"Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. "

b) 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

"Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. "Second Timothy 2:3 says we are to be "good" (Gk. , kalos) soldiers. We are not to be soldiers simply in terms of function and duty--we are to be excellent, noble, and heroic soldiers. Those are the kind of soldiers who earn medals of valor and honor.

The Real War

It's often hard for us as Christians in the United States of America to remember we are at war. We live in a society that, while philosophically hostile to Christianity, has not been hostile legally or politically. That's unlike other countries in the world where the battlelines are more clearly drawn. There Christians have often been required to make extreme sacrifices in every area of life. Here heroism for Christ's cause is not thrust upon us, so we can forget we are warriors. Though our warfare may not seem evident, the battle is all around us.

€ Against Demons

I will never forget a battle with a demon-possessed girl one night at church. She was in one of the rooms of the church kicking, screaming, and throwing furniture around. When I walked into the room, she said, "Don't let him in!" But the voice that said that wasn't her own. My first response was, "Fine, I'm leaving!" But I realized that if the demons didn't like me, it was because I was on God's side. I went in and the girl attacked me, kicking me in the shins so violently I began to bleed. In the power of God several of us spent hours there until she confessed her sin and God, in His grace, purified her. As I left that night I realized for the first time the extent of our warfare against demons.

€ The War against Unbelief

A number of years ago a UCLA philosophy professor who was Jewish expressed a desire to know Christ. I presented the gospel to him and met with him early in the morning for six months. After that time he told me he didn't want to meet with me anymore. He went on to attend a liberal seminary, and became an Episcopalian rector. I don't know his present spiritual state--but he's not where I intended him to be. Our warfare is for the hearts, minds, and souls of people. It's often most evident in our discipling relationships because that's where unbelief becomes most evident.

€ Against Sin

In the past I have sought out wayward husbands from places they should not have been. Our church has experienced lawsuits, threats, and accusations. Those kinds of experiences affirm that as Christians we are at war against sin.

First Thessalonians 4:11 says "to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business. " There are quiet times in the Christian life, but they seem to be more the exception than the rule. They give us time to catch our breath before the next wave of battle hits, for the battle

continues to rage.

2. He knows he must suffer hardship

In 2 Timothy 2:3 the Greek word translated "suffer hardship with" (sunkakopath[ma]eson) could also be translated "endure affliction together," "take your share of suffering," or "take your share of rough treatment." Too often Christianity is presented to non-believers as the cure to all anxieties, difficulties, and trials. That results in a lot of false disciples. Too few present the gospel by saying, "Come to Christ, pick up your armor, and join us in a lifelong struggle against the world, the flesh, and the devil."

3. He knows he's on active duty

Christians are "in active service" (v. 4). The Christian army does not have any members on rest and recreation. All are on the front lines of an active battle. We all suffer together. Some think they can be Christians but not fight as Christian soldiers. They're only deceiving themselves--we're on the front line. Such Christians are asleep on the firing line--a very dangerous position to be in.

4. He knows he must avoid entanglements

The Greek word translated "entangles" (Gk. , emplek[ma]o) in verse 4 means "to interweave." A believer's life is not to be wrapped up in the non-essentials of this life. Because we live on the battlefield, all things are to be subservient to winning the battle. Luke 9 gives three examples of people entangled in the things of this life and who thus could not follow our Lord. One was concerned about his personal comfort (vv. 57-58). Another wanted his inheritance first (vv. 59-60). The third was unwilling to give himself wholeheartedly to Jesus as Lord (vv. 61-62). Their lives were interwoven with non-essentials.

No Time-Outs

A soldier on active duty is always a soldier. He can't call a "time-out" in the middle of battle. The same is true of Christians. Like soldiers in the field must avoid anything that would hamper us in battle. We're to be so consumed with our duties that though the enticements of the world pass by, we are oblivious to them.

5. He seeks to please his commander

A soldier desires to "please the one who enlisted him as a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:4). That refers to a soldier's commander. A Christian's commander is Jesus Christ. That's whom we endeavour to please. As Christian soldiers we're to serve our Lord "with all humility" (Acts 20:19). With that kind of attitude, each of us should be able to say, "I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus" (v. 24). Our Lord is the preeminent example of one about whom the Father could say, "[With Him] I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). The greatest joy of a Christian will be to hear, "Well done, good and faithful soldier" (cf. Matt. 25:21, 23). Our instinctive response to our Lord ought to be respect and obedience from the heart.

C. An Athlete (v. 5)

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

An athlete is Paul's second metaphor showing how to be strong in the grace of Christ. Paul often made use of athletic metaphors (e. g. , 1 Cor. 9:24-26; Eph. 6:12). In 2 Timothy 2:5 Paul uses the Greek verb athle[ma]o to speak generally of those who participate in athletic contests.

1. He must expend maximum effort

Athletes must expend effort. While athletic contests are often determined by talent, they are always determined by effort. That expenditure of effort must begin with a time of preparation long before the contest begins.

2. He has a goal

An athlete wants to win a prize. No one watches a basketball game just to see their team dribble a basketball around in circles. Neither will someone run just to hear people applaud his or her

performance in a race that has no finish line. We understand that contests require a winner.

3. He must be self-sacrificing

For maximum effort an athlete must be self-sacrificing. You may have seen a race where the runner came across the finish line at the peak of his speed and then collapsed, having totally exhausted his physical resources. That's the kind of effort we are to expend in our Christian lives.

4. He must abide by the rules

A runner who hopes to obtain the "prize" (v. 5; Gk. , *stephanos*, "the winner's crown") must compete according to the rules. In the Olympic games, there were three prerequisites any athlete had to meet: he had to be a true-born Greek, he had to prepare for ten months before the games and affirm he had done so before a statue of Zeus (he gave Zeus liberty to take his life if he lied) , and he had to abide by the rules of his event. If he failed to meet any of those requirements, he was immediately disqualified (Paul speaks of such disqualification in 1 Cor. 9:27) . Similarly, believers must be truly born of God, fully trained spiritually, and willing to abide by the rules if they are to be spiritually victorious.

5. He must be self-disciplined

Victory belongs to the disciplined. Most Christians never use the gifts God has given them to their full potential because they never learn to discipline themselves. Self-discipline is a mark of spiritual maturity. The self-disciplined have learned to control their affections, emotions, and priorities. That means refusing to do anything that will dull your competitive edge or sap your spiritual strength.

D. A Farmer (v. 6)

"The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. "

Paul's third metaphor is of a hardworking farmer--one who tills the ground, working to the point of exhaustion. It's a picture in marked contrast to the previous three.

1. He must endure hard work

A teacher has the joy of watching his students learn and grow. A soldier experiences the thrill of victory. An athlete enjoys the moment of reward. But a farmer's lot is the perpetual duty of the seasons. He plows, sows, tends, and reaps. Whether early or late, sun or snow, heat or cold, he must carry on with his duties. He fights too much water, too little water, bugs, and weeds. He waits patiently to see his crop mature, but when and if a harvest is brought in, the satisfaction of a successful harvest is overshadowed by the prospect of beginning the process all over again. I understand the point Paul made. I have known the thrills of the ministry pictured by a teacher, soldier, and athlete. But much of the ministry is routine: you plow, sow, tend, reap, wait, and hope. That requires a willingness to work hard without thrills. Many today are reluctant to work hard in the ministry. I often tell young men that if they desire a successful ministry, they will need to be committed to working to exhaustion--and often alone without any encouragement from others. Even with that kind of commitment, the crop often doesn't not come in as you expected.

2. He reaps great blessings

There's hard work but verse 6 also makes the point that when the crop does come in, the farmer ought to receive the first of the harvest. Many blessings await those who work hard in ministry--both in the present and in the future. Few work themselves to the point of exhaustion, but only they will experience the blessings Paul speaks of here. Great reward from God comes only from great labor for God. In the future it will be the privilege of all hardworking servants of Christ to throw their great rewards at the feet of their Savior.

IV. THE UNDERSTANDING (v. 7)

"Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. "

Each of Paul's illustrations require a degree of self-denial. That means enduring suffering, discipline, or exhaustion. It requires that we avoid entanglement in the things of the world and obey God's rules. Yet our Lord promises a present harvest and future victory.

The Greek word translated "consider" (*noe[ma]o*) means "to think over," "ponder," or "understand. "

It's an unusual command in the New Testament. Paul wanted Timothy to pause in his reading and ponder what he had been told. Did his life reflect the character indicated by each of Paul's illustrations? That's the same question we must ask ourselves.

With that kind of pondering comes the promise that "the Lord will give you understanding in everything. " If we have the spiritual integrity to examine our lives, God will show us where we are in our spiritual walk. The psalmist said to God, "Give me understanding, that I may learn Thy commandments" (Ps. 119:73) . That's the kind of understanding we must have.

Conclusion

A common thread running through Paul's illustrations is the promise of reward that comes from hard work. A teacher has his prize students, a soldier his victory in battle, an athlete his victor's crown, and a farmer his harvest. That's the promise of Hebrews 6:10: "God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. " Our Lord has promised to give abundantly to those who give abundantly for Him!

Focusing on the Facts

1. What passages in Scripture affirm that Christians are empowered?
2. What passages in Scripture remind us of our source of spiritual strength? What kind of exhortations do they contain?
3. The three illustrations found in 2 Timothy 2:3-6 are a series of _____.
4. Paul's likening a Christian to a soldier implies we are _____.
5. As Christians we are not soldiers simply in terms of function and duty. What kind of soldiers are we to be?
6. Why is it often hard for us as Christians in the United States of America to remember we are at war?
7. As Christians our quiet times give us time to catch our breath before the next wave of _____.
8. What happens when Christianity is presented to non-believers as the cure to all anxieties, difficulties, and trials?
9. Because we live on the battlefield, all things are to be _____ to winning the battle.
10. In what Scripture passages other than 2 Timothy 2:3-6 does Paul use the metaphor of an athlete? What kinds of athletes does Paul describe in those passages?
11. When must the effort of an athlete start?
12. Describe the rules of the Greek games. How are those rules similar to the rules a Christian is to abide by?
13. Why do most Christians never use the gifts God has given them to their full potential?
14. How does Paul's picture of the farmer differ from his preceding three?
15. Blessings await those who _____ in ministry.
16. What is the question that we, like Timothy, must ask ourselves?
17. A common thread running through Paul's illustrations is the promise of _____.

Pondering the Principles

1. It's natural for a soldier to seek to please his commander, an athlete to discipline himself, and a hardworking farmer to enjoy the fruits of his labor. Similarly, "as there is no law to compel the body to eat or drink, to digest, to sleep . . . or to do the works of nature, for it is ready to do them of itself when the case so requireth, without respect of reward or punishment . . . even so, after the same sort altogether, doth the godly man behave concerning the works of godliness. He is carried to the

doing of them by his new nature, which is of the Spirit" (Daniel Cawdray, cited in The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations, I. D. E. Thomas, ed. [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977], p. 51) . Is your life centered on Christ and your activities on doing godly works?

2. Too often the gospel message today is accept Christ rather than enlist to serve Christ. The American pastor A. W. Tozer said, "The trouble is that the 'Accept Christ' attitude is likely to be wrong. It shows Christ applying to us rather than us to Him. It makes Him stand hat-in-hand awaiting our verdict on Him, instead of our kneeling with troubled hearts awaiting His verdict on us. It may even permit us to accept Christ by an impulse of mind or emotions, painlessly, at no loss to our ego and no inconvenience to our way of life" (cited in Signposts: A Collection of Sayings from A. W. Tozer [Wheaton, Ill. : Victor, 1988], p. 24). How do you present Christ to others--as a beggar who would like to serve us, or as the Exalted Lord of the Universe who has the right of service from every creature?

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