

## **“Good Soldiers of Christ Jesus” (An Exposition of 2 Timothy 2:3-7)<sup>1</sup>**

### ***Introduction***

This morning we are getting back into our study going through Paul's second epistle to Timothy, his young apprentice in ministry and **“true child in the faith”** (1 Timothy 1:2). 2 Timothy is believed to be the last epistle of Paul before his martyrdom in Rome, where according to church tradition he was beheaded under the reign of Caesar Nero around 65 AD or so.

As we have seen in recent weeks, in some ways the overall theme of this last letter of Paul is that of a call to bear witness for Christ and to be willing to suffer for doing so. You could say that 2 Timothy 1:8 gives us the central theme in this letter. There Paul writes:

**“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner,  
but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God,”**

The theme of *suffering for the gospel of Christ* is repeated a number of times (both by word and by example) in this epistle. It is no surprise that we see it once again here in our text this morning. In v.3 Paul tells Timothy, **“Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”**

In our text Paul presents us with three (3) analogies for the gospel ministry – that of a *soldier* (v.3-4), an *athlete* (v.5), and a *farmer* (v.6). We will be focusing on the first of these today – that of a *soldier*.

As we will see, he makes use of these and other similar analogies elsewhere in his epistles. And he uses these as illustrations of not only *the gospel ministry in particular*, but also of *the Christian life in general*. So if you were hoping that you were off the hook, so to speak, because you are not ordained by God unto the ministry of the gospel, I am happy to disappoint you. For *all of us who believe in Christ* are in some way called to be *salt and light*, and to *confess Christ* before an unbelieving world.

### ***A Good Soldier of Christ Jesus (v.3-4)***

The *first* thing that Paul compares the gospel ministry to here in our text is a *soldier*. In v.3-4 he writes:

**“Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.”**

In saying this he is really comparing the ministry of the gospel to *warfare*. Sounds like ministry is *not* exactly supposed to be a life of comfort and ease, doesn't it? It even sounds dangerous. And in some ways that danger is quite literal, isn't it? Paul calls Timothy to join with him in suffering for the gospel of Christ, and Paul was awaiting *his own execution* in Rome as he wrote those words!

I have often said that I do not believe that I would have made it through college and seminary if I hadn't joined the U.S. Navy first. (I never would have dreamed of attending college at all.) And that is because serving in the military instilled in me a sense of self-discipline, attention to detail, and following the chain of command that I simply never had otherwise.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

In the military if something needs to get done, *you just get it done somehow*. There is no punching the clock (especially at sea), and in some ways no “off work.” And in time of war, lives are at stake, both on the field of battle as well as back home. It is a completely different life than that of a civilian.

I still remember an eye-opening experience that I had in boot camp many years ago. Our Company Commander, Master Chief Petty Officer Eichhorn apparently wanted to make sure that we recruits knew exactly what we had actually signed up for when we enlisted in the Navy.

He asked us what our jobs were, so a number of us raised our hands and started telling him what schools and ratings we had either been assigned to or hoped to be. He snapped at each one in turn, telling us we were wrong, wrong, wrong. And then he told us what our job really was: *to kill people and break things*.

He certainly had our full undivided attention. He wanted us to understand the seriousness of what we had signed up to do. The Navy's slogan back then was “It's not just a job – it's an adventure.” Well, our Master Chief wanted to make sure that we all knew that part of that “adventure” might actually involve going to war!

Now Timothy probably never served a day in the military, but what he was being called to do was very much like doing just that. And this is *not* the first time that Paul had said such a thing to Timothy, was it? Not at all. In 1 Timothy 1:18 he tells him:

**“This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, *that by them you may wage the good warfare . . .*”**

And then again toward the end of that epistle, in 1 Timothy 6:11–12 he writes:

**“But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. *Fight the good fight of the faith*. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”**

Ministers of the gospel are to be as 'good soldiers' enlisted in the army of Christ, 'waging the good warfare' and 'fighting the good fight of the faith.'

### ***Suffering as a Good Soldier of Christ Jesus***

Notice what Paul associates being a “good soldier of Christ Jesus” with – *suffering*. Timothy's orders were not peace-time, shore duty orders. His orders were war-time orders, and so suffering just went with the territory – suffering was *to be expected*, and suffering was *to be endured* for the sake of the gospel of Christ.

No wonder he tells Timothy in v.1 that he needed to “**be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.**” *None of us* naturally have what it takes to be willing to suffer for Christ and for His gospel. We need the grace of God in order to do that.

And notice the context of this command is that of (as Paul says in v.2) entrusting the doctrine of Christ to **“faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”** In other words, doing such a thing faithfully will require the grace of God, and it will also bring along with it a measure of suffering!

But Paul elsewhere *also* compares *the Christian life in general* to warfare, doesn't he? The most familiar such passage in the New Testament is probably Ephesians chapter 6, where Paul speaks of the **“whole armor of God.”** In Ephesians 6:10–12 he writes

**“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”**

He then spends the next 8 verses going into detail about the various pieces of armor that we all need as believers, and what they are to be used for in the midst of the battle.

There is *no such thing* as a Christian who is not enlisted in the army of Christ. If you are a believer, *you serve King Jesus* as a **“soldier of Christ Jesus.”** And that being the case, you have powerful spiritual enemies - **“spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”** (v.12) Do you think of your life as a believer that way? Are *you* a soldier of Christ Jesus? Are you a **“good soldier”**?

There are many things that could be said about ministry and life as warfare, but first among them is that a life of *comfort and ease* should not be our expectation. Peace with God through faith in Christ also brings warfare with the world, the flesh, and the devil. **“We do not wrestle against flesh and blood,”** as Paul says in Ephesians 6:12. (Notice that Paul says **“we”** there!)

### ***Avoiding Entanglements as a Good Soldier of Christ Jesus***

Not only is *suffering* to be expected in the army of Christ, but it is also expected that good soldiers of Christ Jesus will not allow other things to keep us back from the fight. In v.4 Paul writes:

**“No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.”**

The King James Version puts it this way:

**“No man that warreth entangleth himself *with the affairs of this life*; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.”**

I think that is a better way to put it. Now Paul is *not* talking about sinful things here – sinful life patterns and worldliness are to be avoided as a matter of course for a believer in Christ. As Hebrews 12:1 tells us:

**“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,”**

*Paul, however, is talking about letting other things (even good things) interfere with our wartime footing. John Stott puts it this way:*

“The Christian, who is intended to live in the world and not contract out of it, cannot of course avoid ordinary duties at home, at work, and in the community. Indeed as a Christian he should be outstandingly conscientious in doing and not dodging them. Nor should he forget, as Paul reminded Timothy in his first letter, either that 'everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving' or that 'God . . . richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy' (1 Tim. 4:4; 6:17). So what is forbidden the good soldier of Jesus Christ is not all 'secular' activities, but rather 'entanglements' which, though they may be perfectly innocent in themselves, may hinder him from fighting Christ's battles.”<sup>2</sup>

How many professing Christians today are so “**entangled**” with the “**affairs of this life**” that they have no time or resources left for serving the Lord Jesus in any meaningful way?

Believers should avoid two extremes. *First*, we should *not* be so busy with church-related activities seemingly every day of the week that we have no time for family, rest, and living as salt and light among our unbelieving friends and neighbors. Some of you no doubt remember what that is like. We must not use Christian activity or activism as an excuse for failing to fulfill our God-given responsibilities in our homes and in our communities.

On the other hand – and this seems *much more prevalent* in our day than the previous extreme – we as believers must also be careful to avoid the other extreme of being so preoccupied or entangled with the affairs of this life that we have no real time for serving God.

How many professing believers seem to spend half of their time, energy, and resources chasing after entertainment or amusements of various kinds. How often do *various forms of recreation* even crowd out public worship on the Lord's day! This should simply not be the case.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism devotes no less than six (6) questions to the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment (the commandment to “**Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy**” - Exodus 20:8). One of those questions is as follows:

“**Q. 60.** *How is the sabbath to be sanctified?* **A.** The sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy.”

Are you resting from “worldly employments and recreations” on the Lord's day so that you can devote the day to worship? Or are those things crowding out the things of God?

For example, many youth sports leagues commonly schedule their games on the Lord's day. (Years ago that was almost never the case.) Perhaps if more Christians refused to have their children participate in those things on Sundays that might effect a change?

Do we allow other things to crowd out *our own private time of prayer and Bible study*? Do we allow other things to keep us from attending Bible study together on Sunday nights or our other Bible studies, some of which only meet once per month?

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2 *The Message of 2 Timothy*, p.53

## Conclusion

John Piper has written a book on Missions called *Let the Nations Be Glad*. In that book he includes a chapter on prayer, and there he says some things that are applicable to what we are talking about in our text more generally. There he writes:

“Most people show by their priorities and their casual approach to spiritual things that they believe we are in peacetime not wartime. . . . In wartime the newspapers carry headlines about how the troops are doing. In wartime families talk about the sons and daughters on the front lines and write to them and pray for them with heart-wrenching concern for their safety. In wartime we are on the alert. We are armed. We are vigilant. In wartime we spend money differently – there is austerity, not for its own sake, but because there are more strategic ways to spend money than on new tires at home. The war effort touches everybody. We all cut back. The luxury liner becomes a troop carrier.” (p.44)

What do *your* priorities show about what kind of time that you believe we are in – either peacetime or wartime? If you were to examine *your calendar and your checkbook* (so to speak), what would those things reveal? In his Word God requires of us a tithe (tenth) of our *income* and one day in seven of our *time*. He actually demands our *time* (and so we ourselves) more than He does our *money*! But do our calendars and checkbooks reflect that fact? Are we obeying Christ in these things?

What does your *calendar or schedule* say about your priorities? Does it show that the things of God are the top priority? Or are any number of other lesser things crowding out that which is eternal and far more important?

Or what about your *checkbook*? Things are getting tighter and tighter everywhere, despite what we are being told by people at the highest levels of our government. The cost of gasoline, food, housing, and everything else has many of us more than a little concerned. Do we trust God with our finances? Are we faithfully tithing, and supporting the work of the church and foreign missions? Or is comfort our goal?

Do we remember to *pray for our missionaries* who serve as the proverbial “tip of the spear” on the front lines of the Great Commission, making disciples of all the nations for Jesus Christ? Are we supporting them to the best of our abilities? In Luke 16:11 our Lord Jesus tells us, **“If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?”**

Brothers and sisters, is it our **“aim”** in life, as Paul says in v.4, to **“to please the one who enlisted”** us over all else? Is *your* aim to please the Lord Jesus Christ in how you live, serving Him in all things **“as a good soldier of Christ Jesus”**?

In Christ **“we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”** (Romans 8:37) because of the cross and resurrection of Christ our service as soldiers of Christ cannot help but be victorious in the end. Not even **“death”** itself (v.38) can change that.

So let us earnestly serve as **‘good soldiers of Christ Jesus’** and seek to please Him in all things, knowing that He suffered the cross in our place for our salvation from sin! - Amen