



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

DISCIPLINED ATHLETE, HARDWORKING FARMER!—2 TIMOTHY 2:5-7

COLORADO

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Paul exhorts Timothy to be strong in Christ Jesus offering three illustrations to further clarify how Timothy can be faithful to God's calling. Last week we looked at the example of the good soldier from 2 Timothy 2:3-5. This study will focus on the disciple of Christ as a disciplined athlete and the hard-working farmer.

I. DISCIPLINED ATHLETE, HARDWORKING FARMER— 2 TIMOTHY 2:5-7

2 Timothy 2:5-7- "And also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything."

A. THE DISCIPLINED ATHLETE- 2 TIMOTHY 2:5

Paul uses the picture of an athlete to illustrate the importance of sacrificial discipline and obedient devotion to Christ.

1. "IF ANYONE COMPETES AS AN ATHLETE"- 2 TIMOTHY 2:5A

The verb "competes" refers to:

"competes" Greek "**athleo**" verb meaning to contest, contend, wrestle, struggle, required great determination, maximum effort to win.

Paul is talking about the effort and determination necessary for any athlete who wishes to compete and win. It will require maximum effort even to the point of exhaustion, sacrifice and constant training with self-discipline that refuses to do anything that could hinder that competitive edge in the relentless pursuit of victory. It is said that although athletic contests are often determined by talent, they are always determined by effort. It is this effort of single-minded determination and dedication that is required of every believer. And this speaks to both personal behavior and inner attitudes in our lives that strive, contest, contend and struggle against our flesh, the world and Satan with the goal of Philippians 3:14, "*...but this one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*"

2. "HE DOES NOT WIN THE PRIZE UNLESS HE COMPETES ACCORDING TO THE RULES."- 2 TIMOTHY 2:5B

The prize referred to is the winner's wreath or crown. The value of the wreath was not what was pursued by the athlete, but rather the accomplishment it commemorated.

"competes according to the rules" Greek "**athlein nomimos**" striving lawfully, describes a professional rather than an amateur athlete.

First Paul emphasizes that this athlete is one who is a professional.

This one concentrates completely on the struggle. It's a full time dedication of that individual's life to excellence in the chosen contest. The whole of our life as believers must be to live out our faith with such discipline and self-denial.¹

Secondly Paul emphasizes that just as an athlete must observe the rules, so there is a call to obedience to God and His Word. In the Olympic Games, each athlete had to meet three pre-requisites:

1. *The athlete must be a true born Greek.*
2. *The athlete had to prepare for 10 months prior to the games.*
3. *Had to abide by the rules of the event.*

If the athlete failed to meet any requirements, he was disqualified just like Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 9:27. All that sacrifice, effort and hard work was wasted if the athlete didn't compete according to the rules...lawfully. Paul is stressing the same for believers; we must be born again, we must be faithful in our training...studying God's Word, discipline, prayer and then living according to God's divine standards in order to not be disqualified as we run. It will require constant dedication and continual effort. The athlete will give all this dedication and effort for a perishable wreath, but the one we are striving for as believers in Jesus Christ is imperishable as Paul would later write in 2 Timothy 4:8.

B. THE HARDWORKING FARMER – 2 TIMOTHY 2:6

Paul uses the hardworking farmer as his third example to instruct Timothy on how he can be faithful to His call.

"hardworking" Greek "**kopiaio**" verb meaning great weariness, labor to point of exhaustion, toil intensely, sweat and strain if necessary.

A hardworking farmer tills the ground, working to the point of exhaustion just to grow crops and survive. They must work long hours of heavy, hard and exhausting labor. There is the constant toil of plowing, sowing, tending, and reaping the hopeful harvest. This harvest would be raised under every kind of year round conditions: fighting pests, weeds, weather, heat, early frost, floods or droughts. Year after year the farmer would repeat this whole process again. Even with the endless, tireless, hard toil a fruitful crop was never guaranteed but the farmer's hope was that his effort would be rewarded with a good harvest. That's what would drive the farmer...a good harvest.

Paul was encouraging Timothy to not be lazy or shrink back but labor zealously with a view for the harvest. (1 Corinthians 3:6-7, 15:58) Be faithful in guarding the truth and committed to the labor of proclaiming that truth. Be willing to expend yourself for the

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(5) “And also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. (6) The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. (7) Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.”

gospel and the lost who desperately need Jesus Christ. Do the year round work of teaching, encouraging, exhorting and challenging believer’s to grow in their faith. Remain steadfast, committed and patient in the process with people through disappointments or desertions, with a heart set on Christ and a view for reaping souls for eternity. It’s the moment by moment sacrifice to remain faithful to Jesus Christ in the midst of every kind of hardship. It’s never giving up but working to the point of exhaustion if need be in the service of Jesus Christ. This is what much of ministry is about; endless, tireless plowing, hoping, waiting, often without thanks or being able to see the fruit of your labor for a long time or maybe never in this life. You will work hard often with no immediate results. As a believer we are all engaged in ministry no matter what our station in life may be.

1. “...OUGHT TO BE THE FIRST TO RECEIVE HIS SHARE OF THE CROPS.”- 2 TIMOTHY 2:6B

Farmers would often be paid with a portion of the crops they labored to plant and produce. As Christians, we must remember that our good work is never for our salvation, but always comes as result of our salvation. Ephesians 2:8-10 remind us of this truth concluding with, “we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Our purpose now as believers is to fulfill the good works God has created for us to accomplish in His service...each day that we live. What a privilege that He would invite each of us to join Him in carrying out His plan. And God will reward faithful service. We will receive a share of the “crops”. The time of our reward may come in this life or the next but it will always include divine approval and blessings from God. 1 Corinthians 3:13-14 reminds us of that reward for earnest, steady work that remains in Christ’s service.

Many Christians are like farmers. There might be occasional times of excitement and special satisfaction. But, often the work is routine and hard and lonely. You may be underpaid, treated unfairly, misunderstood, unappreciated by others. But Christ’s reward to His faithful disciples will never be deficient, never unfair, never late and never omitted.²

There will never be such a thing as quick results but just as a farmer toils hard and learns to wait with patience for the fruit of his labor, so too must a believer in Jesus Christ.³ The reward will be worth the toil and it will always far outweigh the toil.

C. “CONSIDER WHAT I SAY...” – 2 TIMOTHY 2:7

Each illustration Paul has given requires self-denial, endurance through suffering, discipline and yes even weariness and exhaustion. Each require avoiding entanglements that trip us up or hinder us from devoted obedience to the Lord. Before the crown there must

be the cross. Hardship, struggle, discipline, labor- all must precede the enjoyment of the reward and now Paul calls on Timothy to think about these sobering truths.⁴ When Paul says to “Consider what I say”, he isn’t just giving friendly advice or counsel.

“consider” Greek “*noeo*” this verb is an imperative requiring action, a command to think over, ponder, perceive clearly with the mind, understand, look down for maximum benefit.

It’s not a quick read or a casual glance. Paul wants us to look at our own life and carefully pause and ponder what he is saying. And with this kind of pondering, there is a promise that God will give us understanding, wisdom and insight throughout our lives. Does our life reflect the qualities indicated by Paul’s illustrations? Are we disciplined, focused, willing to sacrifice...willing to pay the price? If the soldiers, athletes, farmers endure for prizes less glorious and less lasting, can we not endure opposition for the sake of bringing the good news of Christ’s reconciling work to the world?⁵

Each example must submit to discipline and toil for the sake of the glory which comes at the end...for the soldier it’s the victory in battle, an athlete has his crown and a farmer has his harvest. It’s the same with Christians. The Christian can be certain that after the effort of this life there come the joy of heaven; and the greater the struggle, the greater the joy.⁶ Hebrews 6:10 confirms that promise of a reward for those who are dedicated to serving the Lord with sacrifice, discipline and diligent labor in His service. We must be single-minded in our devotion to Christ like a soldier who only wants to please his commander, disciplined as an athlete and labor like a hard working farmer. Live like this and you will have what’s needed to be strong in grace guarding the treasure, disciplined through challenges, diligent throughout hardships and invested in lives for eternity’s sake!⁷ Stop...ponder and remember what 1 Corinthians 15:58 says,

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.”

¹Barclay, William, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*. Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, Kentucky, 1956, revised 1975 and 2003. Pg.181-182.

²MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary on 2 Timothy*. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg.48.

³Barclay, William, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*. Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, Kentucky, 1956, revised 1975 and 2003. Pg.182-183.

⁴Kent, Homer A., Jr., *The Pastoral Epistles*. Moody Publishers, 1926 revised 1958, 1982, 1986 and 2010. Pg. 262-263.

⁵Dever, Mark, *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept*. Crossway Books: Wheaton, Illinois, 2005. Pg.365.

⁶Barclay, William, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*. Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, Kentucky, 1956, revised 1975 and 2003. Pg.183.

⁷Hughes, R. Kent and Chapell, Bryan, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus; To Guard the Deposit*. Crossway Books: Wheaton, Illinois, 2000. Pg. 197.