

Daily Bible Study

“Metaphors of The Christian Life ~ An Athlete & Farmer”

2 Timothy 2:5-7

June 8 – June 14, 2014

MONDAY – As we continue our study of **2 Timothy 2** we will look at more metaphors of the Christian minister and every saint of God. The two we see this week are that of the Athlete and the Farmer. Last week we saw the metaphor of the Soldier and interestingly Paul uses the same three pictures, the Soldier, Athlete and Farmer close together in **1 Corinthians 9:6, 9:7, 9:24–27**. We also find similar thoughts in **Hebrews 12:1-2**. We have already seen that the hardness of the soldier, and now we will see the activity of the athlete and the labor of the farmer all point to the earnestness which make up a life of faith in Jesus. The Christian life is a call to follow Jesus and that involves hard work, discipline, patience, and often discouragement, disappointments and suffering (**1 Peter 2:21** ~ “*To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps*”.) The Christian life is a life lived in and through *the grace that is in Christ Jesus (2:1)*. All grace is from Jesus and only those who follow Jesus as He instructed us to and live by faith in His grace, know the blessedness of it. Let’s now turn to our text as we continue with these beautiful pictures or *Metaphors of the Christian Life. 2 Timothy 2:5-7*: “⁵ *And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.* ⁶ *The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops.* ⁷ *Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.*”

Suggestion for Prayer: God, teach me this week from Sacred Scripture how I need to live as a Christian and give me strength to do so for Your names sake, Amen.

TUESDAY – **2 Timothy 2:5**: “⁵ *And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.*” We will take the next two days to look over this Metaphor as it is, like the others Paul uses, loaded with things we need to meditate on, learn, and digest. Turning from the image of the Roman soldier Paul now introduces the competitor in the Greek games, the athlete. As mentioned earlier, the Christian life is one that requires discipline, integrity, and dedication and in the example of an athlete we find all of these illustrated. The Greek games, the Olympics of Paul’s day, had their own rules just as sports do today. We hear often of performance enhancing drugs in sports which in most sports is a breaking of the rules. Some athletes “won” the race or competition only to be found out as a rule breaker and because they were caught cheating had to return their medal, trophy, or crown. For us as Christians, there are also rules and principles to be observed and obeyed as

we live our daily lives. The rulebook is none other than the Sacred Scripture’s which in fact contain and put forth the law of God. Contrary to antinomian teaching which says that the law has been abolished and we live with disregard for any law or rule, the Christian is under obligation to live “lawfully”, or as it is said in our text, *compete according to the rules*, in short to obey God’s moral laws. We understand that we are not “under law” as a way of salvation which, to commend us to God, but we are under the law in that it is a guide for our behavior. Rather than abolish and do away with the law Scripture actually says that God first sent his Son to die for us “*in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us*”, and now He sends The Holy Spirit to live in us and to write his law in our hearts! (**Romans 8:3-4, Jeremiah 31:33**). And finally today we note that there is no re is no crown *unless he competes according to the rules* not of course because our law-keeping could ever justify us, but rather because without it we give evidence that we have never been justified.

Suggestion for Prayer: God, help me understand I need to respect & obey Your Holy law. Thank You that Jesus kept it perfectly in my place but help me by your Spirit to live according to Your Word.

WEDNESDAY – **2 Timothy 2:5**: “⁵ *And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.*” Continuing to look at this Metaphor of athlete we notice that the context would suggest that *competing according to the rules* has a wider application than merely to our moral conduct. Paul is describing both Christian service and conduct. Our faithful conduct and service are tied together. The moral law of the gospel is given to us as a guide for our behavior but if we disregard it and do not seek to live a holy and obedient life expressed in living and serving as Jesus did then we have no right to expect God to bless us and see our Christian life flourish. Continuing his point that faithfulness matters, Paul here seems to be saying that rewards for service depend on it. Timothy must faithfully pass on the precious deposit of the gospel to faithful men and the Christian pastor, and all of us as saints must be faithful to teach the truth, building with proper materials on the foundation of Christ, if our work is to endure and not be burned up (**1 Corinthians 3:10–15**). Paul set an example as he finished the race, fighting the good fight of faith (fullness) to the end and then said that those who do the same will win a “*crown of righteousness*” on that last day (**2 Timothy 4:7, 8**). So we are in this *race* as Paul put it and the Christian life is often and regularly described as a race in the New Testament. We have said in the past that we need to be reminded that we are not competing against each other although Scripture tells us to *Outdo one another in showing honor (Romans 12:10 ESV)*. But we are to *compete* and do so *according to the rules*. We are to run the Christian race *nomimōs*, “right, lawfully”. William Barclay points out “there is a very interesting point in the Greek here which is difficult to bring out in translation. The Authorized Version speaks of *striving lawfully*. The Greek is *athlein nomimōs*. In fact, that is the Greek phrase which was used by the later writers to describe a *professional* as opposed to an *amateur* athlete. The person who strove *nomimōs* was the one who concentrated completely on the

struggle. That struggle was not just a spare-time concern, as it might be for an amateur; it was a full-time dedication of that individual's life to excellence in the chosen contest. Here, then, we have the same idea as in Paul's picture of the Christian as a soldier. Christians must concentrate their lives upon their Christianity just as professional athletes concentrate upon their chosen contest. The spare-time Christian is a contradiction in terms; the whole of life should be an endeavour to live out our Christianity." To wrap this verse up lets briefly mention a couple characteristics of athletes that are to be true of Christians as well. Athletes are under *discipline* and *self-denial*. Schedules of training regardless of ones feelings must be carried out with a discipline to let nothing interfere with it. Christians must train themselves never to relax in the life long effort to *press toward the mark*.

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me compete hard with all my heart, soul, mind & strength. Not competing against my brothers and sisters but against my sin and self as I strive to both obey & serve.

THURSDAY – 2 Timothy 2:6: ⁶ *The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops.* The next Metaphor of the Christian life which we see after Athlete is that of **Farmer**. If the athlete must play fair, the farmer must work hard. The image here is not of the man who enjoys working in his garden as a hobby on summer evenings. It pictures the *hardworking (Kopiao-* "to engage in hard work, implying difficulties and trouble") *farmer*, the man who toils and labors without any thought of the glamour and medals associated with the soldier and the athlete. In **Psalm 126:5-6**, there is a picture of the painful and anxious care with which the farmer of ancient times sowed the seed. *"May those who sow in tears reap with songs of joy. He that goes forth weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him"* (RSV). Even though times have changed in reference to machinery and so forth this principle is still true. The farmer has to toil endlessly if he is to get a share of the crop. The Christian cannot expect a fruitful spiritual life without perseverance and effort. J C Ryle has said, "I will never shrink from declaring my belief that there are no spiritual gains without pains. I should as soon expect a farmer to prosper in business who concerned himself with sowing his fields and never looking at them till harvest, as expect a believer to attain to holiness who was not diligent about his Bible reading, his prayers, and the use of his Sunday. Our God is a God who works by means, and He will never bless the soul of that man who pretends to be so high and spiritual that he can get on without them". Farming can not only be hard work but often tedious, routine, strenuous and boring. Unlike the soldier and the athlete the farmer's life is as Bishop Handley Moule described, "totally devoid of excitement, remote from all glamour of peril and of applause". But the first share of the crops goes to the hardworking farmer. He deserves it. His good harvest is due as much to his toil and perseverance as to anything else and that is the reason why a sluggard never makes a good farmer, as the book of Proverbs insists. He always loses his harvest, either because he is asleep or because he was too lazy or because he has allowed his fields to become overgrown (**Proverbs 10:5, 20:4, 24:30-31**). Two harvests if you will should be being cultivated by Timothy as well as us; holiness and converts. It is The Spirit Himself who as the chief farmer

produces the good crop of Christian qualities in a believer but we have our part to play as well. We are to *"walk by the Spirit"* and *"sow to the Spirit"* (**Galatians 5:16, 6:8**), if we would reap the harvest of holiness. Many Christians are surprised that they are not noticeably growing in holiness but maybe they are neglecting to cultivate the field by following the Spirit's promptings and disciplining themselves. *"Whatsoever a man sows, that he will also reap"* (**Galatians 6:7**). The winning of converts is a harvest too. Jesus said in reference to those in need and ready to hear the gospel and be changed by it, *"The harvest is plentiful..."* (**Matthew 9:37**). Interestingly Jesus finished that verse saying, *"...the laborers are few"*. It is God who gives the increase and growth (**1 Corinthians 3:6-7**) but we again have no excuse to be idle. One reason the sowing of the good seed of God's word and the reaping of the harvest is hard work is because the laborers are few. As John Stott put it, "Souls are hardly won for Christ, not by the slick, automatic application of a formula, but by tears and sweat and pain, especially in prayer and in sacrificial personal friendship." This is why true servant, sacrificial Christian work and ministry is so unpopular. Paul had a tremendously "fruitful" ministry and many reasons could be given but maybe we should not overlook the almost obsessive way he loved, labored, and zealously worked and ministered for Christ's church and spread the seed of the Word of the gospel. Patient contentment is the farmer's friend and he is ready to work (**Kopiao-** toil to the point of exhaustion) at any hour.

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me to work hard like the farmer and give myself to the ministry of serving Your church and proclaiming the gospel seed of Your Word to the lost and dying.

FRIDAY – 2 Timothy 2:7: ⁷ *Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.* Paul here seems to address the challenge to Timothy of discerning the meaning of the metaphors he has just used. He tells Him *Consider what I say...* Timothy, this is not merely my words but the very words of God I am bringing to You as His Apostle. It reminds us of the words Jesus often used when concluding his parables, *"He, who has ears to hear, let him hear."* We can be guilty of hearing God's Word preached, or read from the Scriptures, but without really reflecting on it so as to get insight into its meaning and application to our own lives. Many Christians never get down to any serious Bible study and are content with the kind of devotional reading that never really stretches their minds. As Peter Williams puts it, "God never bypasses the mind and the mental struggle involved in getting to grips with the truth of his Word. Ministers especially should give themselves to in-depth study of God's Word, digging deeply into the text so as to gain insight into its meaning and message for the benefit of their people. At the same time, care should be taken not to make it simply an intellectual exercise, but to accompany it with prayer for the illumination which only the Holy Spirit can give." Paul backs up the command to Consider with a statement of promise. And in the promise we detect an allusion to **Proverbs 2:6**, *"For the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding."*

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me value Your Word & ministry and study, think, and grow.