

PASTORAL GLEANINGS ON GUARDING OUR HEARTS

III. Enduring Spiritual Hardship In Ministry

(2 Timothy 2:3-6)

I. Introduction

- A. Spiritual hardship in Christian service is a common experience: when Paul was awaiting his martyrdom for the faith (2 Timothy 4:6, 16), he urged Timothy to “suffer together with” (*sugkakopatheo*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 780) him (2 Timothy 2:3), adding in 2 Timothy 3:12 that all who would live godly in Christ Jesus would suffer persecution.
- B. Paul then used three figures to teach Timothy how to endure spiritual hardship, adding that by dwelling on them, Christ would open up depths of edifying meaning in them for Timothy, 2 Timothy 2:4-7 (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to 2 Tim. 2:7). We thus study these figures for our insight, application and edification:

II. Enduring Spiritual Hardship In Ministry, 2 Timothy 2:3-6.

- A. The figure of a soldier calls one to counter Satan in staying devoted to God’s calling, 2 Timothy 2:4:
 1. Like a soldier who must not let himself become entangled in civilian affairs so that he can obey his commanding officer’s orders, believers must make God’s calling for them their utmost priority in life.
 2. Since Paul pictured a soldier who goes to war in this illustration, he implied the presence of the angelic conflict where Satan seeks to sidetrack him into seemingly harmless civilian pursuits but that take him away from God’s calling. A believer must then view such distractions as a harmful Satanic threat.
 3. The verb “entangled” (*ekpleko*) exists twice in the New Testament, and both times only in the passive voice (2 Tim. 2:4 & 2 Pet. 2:20) and in a negative context (Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 256). Paul thus warned of Satan’s aggressive attack on a believer to try to move him away from God’s calling, so the believer must view that pressure as a spiritual threat to be overcome at all costs.
 4. Paul’s use of the negative substantive *oudeis* (“nobody,” U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 733; *Ibid.*, Arndt & Gingrich, p. 596) in the context of a soldier implies a need to oppose something, so God’s servant must guard against yielding to Satan’s effort to get him entangled in things that distract him from God’s calling.
- B. The figure of an athlete calls one to counter Satan by keeping his ministry methods upright, 2 Timothy 2:5:
 1. In this figure of an athlete, Paul urged Timothy to utilize those methods in his ministry that conform to Scripture’s standard in order to receive God’s approval and eternal reward.
 2. Since this figure is stated in a negative way like the first figure of a soldier, Timothy was to be on guard in the realm of the angelic conflict that he not fall prey to errant ministry methods and so miss God’s reward.
- C. The figure of a toiling farmer calls one to be edified and to edify others by intense Bible exposition, v. 6:
 1. This figure is given in the positive sense in contrast to the two figures of a soldier and an athlete, so, in the broad context, it teaches the need for God’s servant to provide for his own edification and that of others:
 - a. These three figures of a soldier, an athlete and a toiling farmer follow Paul’s call in 2 Timothy 2:2 to proclaim God’s Word and to entrust that ministry to other faithful men who in turn would teach others.
 - b. Thus, Timothy was to work hard to expound Scripture for his own edification before sharing that teaching with others to edify them like a hardworking farmer eats of his crops before others eat of them.
 2. This figure broadens the focus on edification in several encouraging ways (as follows):
 - a. If a believer works hard to expound Scripture, he will be the first to profit since the insight he glean from Scripture will edify his own soul. He as the hard working farmer will thus partake of his own crops!
 - b. However, if he edifies himself by his own Bible exposition, he will be able to edify others to whom he teaches those expounded truths (cf. 2 Timothy 2:2) as others partake of the hard working farmer’s crops!
 - c. Also, the believer’s self-edification that also spreads to edify his hearers due to his own initial intense exposition of Scripture will itself be encouraging evidence that he is pleasing God and will get His reward.
 - d. Finally, all this edification acts to motivate God’s servant to **continue** intensely expounding Scripture in **further** countering Satan’s efforts to distract him from ministry and to lure him to disobey God’s methods!

Lesson: *The hardships we believers face in ministry are largely due to the angelic conflict, for Satan seeks to distract, discredit, and thereby spiritually to discourage a believer into failing in his calling. The answer to Satan’s opposition is for the believer to watch out for Satan’s efforts to distract him from his calling and to discredit his ministry by sinful means, and then to edify himself and others by intensely expounding the Word of God.*

Application: *May we serve God with His blessing like good soldiers, good athletes, and hard working farmers.*