

2 Timothy

I. Introduction

- A. **2 Timothy 2:1-7** . . . You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. [2] The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. [3] Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. [4] 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. [5] 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.
- B. Last Sunday we looked at the importance of helping others learn and grow by passing on what we have learned and know. Today we are going to look at God's exhortation to willingly pay the price of being involved in some form of Christian ministry – which we will expand to include the cost of being a regular Christian, and the cost of doing battle with ourselves in order to become a mature, godly Christian.
- C. However, before looking at these three areas, I want to remind you that whether you are a good soldier of Christ Jesus, or you are seeking a more self-pleasing life by serving the world, your flesh, and the devil, you are going to suffer hardships. Both ways of life are costly.
1. To whatever degree we seek a more self-pleasing life by serving the world, our flesh, and the devil, to at least that degree we bring hardship, loss, and forms of death into our lives. In other words, in spite of the perceived benefits and pleasures gained from sin, we actually make our lives worse – for in spite of sin's grand beginnings, its outcome is corruption (*the slow process of decay*), destruction, suffering, and death.
 2. However, if we are pursuing godliness and making progress in putting an end to our participation in selfishness and sin, we will avoid the hardships, destruction, and death from doing wrong. But that does not free us from the hardships that result from a serious pursuit of godliness, or from being a Christian in an ungodly world, or from standing with and for God in Christian ministry.

D. Prayer

II. Paying the price of Christian ministry, being a Christian, growing in godliness

A. [3] **Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.**

1. In this context, to suffer hardship is to endure, or to bear up under trials, difficulties, inconveniences, or pain without thinking God has failed us, or sinking to the depths of despair, or giving up, or turning against God – as if He is unworthy of our trust and adoration.
2. In **Acts 14:19-22**, Paul speaks of suffering this way in relation to Christian ministry, but also in relation to regular Christians who are not in Christian ministry.
3. **Acts 14:19-22**, “But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned **Paul** (*Christian minister*) and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. [20] But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derby. [21] After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, [22] strengthening the souls of the **disciples** (*regular Christians*) encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”
4. The point is, suffering hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus is not new to our age. Nor is it unique to super Christians, or confined to those in Christian ministry. It is the lot of any follower of Jesus Christ who is committed to growing in godliness, maturing as a Christian, and living a godly life in a sinful world.

B. **Suffering the costs of Christian ministry**

1. Where persecution against Christians is obvious, those in Church leadership positions and other recognized positions of Christian ministry are most often the first to be persecuted.
 - a. For example, China goes after the Christian leaders, first, and then the followers. This is one of the reasons why Paul exhorts those in ministry to suffer as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.
 - b. And the allusion to soldiers is appropriate in that it provides a reasonably descriptive picture of the position of the Christian worker in relation to God and the hardships suffered.
2. Consider: a soldier leaves the comfort and security of home, is exposed to the elements, sometimes pushed to exhaustion, expected to bear heavy burdens, put in harrowing situations, and exposed to the possibility of being wounded, taken as a prisoner, or killed.

- a. This is a life of hard work and challenge. Yet it is the kind of life a good soldier commits to for the sake of his country, his leader, and his fellow soldiers.
 - b. Those who are in ministry commit to this kind of life for our Savior's sake, for the sake of the spiritual health of the church, for the sake of the lost, and for the sake of building and expanding God's kingdom.
3. Here in **vs 3**, the example of a **soldier** is used to describe those who are in some form of Christian ministry. In **1 Corinthians 9:24-27**, the example of an **athlete** is used to describe those who are regular Christians, that is, who are not in a ministry position. This is an interesting comparison for several reasons. For example:
 - a. A soldier faces an enemy, while an athlete faces a rival.
 - b. A rival may defeat the athlete, but an enemy is out to do away with the soldier in order to remove him as a threat.
4. However, the hardships of ministry go beyond these kinds of challenges. There is the challenge of serving diligently, even when you are not getting the responses hoped for from those who have been served for many years.
 - a. There is the challenge of leading those served to spiritual health and Christian maturity – even as they are facing the challenges and temptations of everyday life that seek to pull them back into the ways of the world, the flesh, and the devil.
 - b. There are challenges to one's health (*Amy Carmichael-bed ridden for 20 years in India*), loss of freedom (*Adoniram Judson-imprisoned in Burma*), and separation from one's family (*Chews, Nixons*).
5. Christian ministry may look appealing to an outsider. It may look easier than factory or construction work. It may look less stressful than working in the business world. And in some ways it may be. Yet Christian ministry has the kind of challenges and hardships that moved Paul to exhort those in ministry to endure the hardships as if they are good soldiers of Christ Jesus.
6. Therefore, I urge you to pray for those in ministry, and to offer them the kind of support that will help and encourage them to endure the challenges of their work – until it is done.

C. Suffering the costs of being a regular Christian

1. God is not asking those of us who are not in some form of Christian ministry to suffer the same hardships as those who are. However, do

- you remember Paul's words from **Acts 14:22**, "*Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God*"? Knowing what lay ahead for these believers, he spoke those words to encourage them to continue in the faith in spite of the hardships faced.
- a. And if that is not enough to convince you that you will experience hardships as a regular Christian, let me remind you of **James 1:2-4**, where we read that God uses trials and tribulations to build our faith and progressively transform us into the likeness of His son, Jesus Christ. To be taught and trained by God in this way can rightly be called "*a hardship to be endured*," – though those who value the resulting spiritual growth joyfully endure the hardships.
 - b. Therefore, those of us who are **not** in ministry still need to see ourselves as good soldiers of Christ Jesus who are willing to suffer hardship for our Leader and His cause. After all, there is a war to win – not only by God over Satan and good over evil, but also by the Spirit over our flesh and love over our selfishness.
2. To see some practical examples of these kinds of hardships, consider the various environments in which we live.
- a. When you are a teenager, you face the challenges of being raised by imperfect parents. And as a teenager, you are required to work your way through the educational process with its imperfections and challenges.
 - b. When you are a parent, you face the challenges of raising imperfect children.
 - c. If you are an adult, you face the challenges of being single, or if you get married – you face the challenges married life.
 - d. As an adult, there are the challenges of living in a neighborhood and working in a job where you are surrounded by unbelievers – some who are responsible and caring, some who stay to themselves, and others who make life harder because they are irresponsible and could care less.
 - e. And as if that is not enough, there are the challenges of deciding what kind of entertainment you'll partake of, and how you are going to deal with the various political opinions of those who are trying to persuade you to accept their opinions.
 - f. And in all these situations, you have the challenge of figuring out how to live as a Christian ought to live while being exhorted by God, the church, and the scriptures to remain faithful to the will of God and the truths of God's word.

3. The reality is, in all these things there is a price to pay and hardships to endure that are often made more challenging because of our Christianity.
4. Therefore, a healthy mindset, reasoned thinking, good attitudes, a growing faith, and a helpful perspective are vital.
5. One helpful perspective that is set before us in **vs 3** is that of seeing ourselves as good soldiers of Christ Jesus, who, as good soldiers, willingly suffer the hardships experienced along the way for the sake of our leader and His cause.
6. How do you look at the hardships the come from living the Christian life? Do you look at them as a burden and want relief? Or do you see them through the eyes of a good soldier who wants to please His Lord and Master, Jesus Christ?

D. Suffering the costs of doing battle with ourselves in order to become mature, godly Christians

1. You cannot get a good education, that is, one that prepares you for the real world without suffering multiple hardships along the way.
 - a. In the same way, you cannot thoughtfully, purposefully, and with perseverance pursue godly Christianity and spiritual maturity without suffering multiple hardships along the way.
 - b. Within the realm of those multiple hardships, the hardest work you will do and the highest price you will pay comes from **battling yourself** in an effort to put off what ought not to be in you and put on the godliness that ought to be there.
 - c. It is true, God will empower you and help you all along the way. And yet, in spite of that, this process is like an all-out war, and like the most costly of wars, and like a never-ending war.
2. The reason this is the most costly of wars is because it requires us to die to, and therefore lose out on whatever benefits we believe we are gaining from such things as our self-centeredness, our self-rule, our pride, the ungodly pleasures that we treasure, the unfounded and irrational fears that we harbor, and our sense of security and well-being that we gain from what is not secure or good for us.
 - a. Beyond that, this war is costly because it means putting an end to gratifying our felt-needs – which from an **ungodly** perspective is a great loss, and the reason so many are unwilling to pay this price. A few examples of felt-needs are the belief that we need approval and acceptance, power and control, and comfort and ease to be okay and feel safe.

- b. And it doesn't stop there, for included in the cost of godliness is the need to **not only** change our behavior, but also our beliefs, values, and attitudes, our way of thinking, and the evil desires lodged deep within our hearts.
 3. But those are only examples of the putting off side of doing battle with ourselves in order to grow in godliness.
 - a. On the putting on or positive side, there is the cost of protected time for study, thought, prayer, and being disciplined.
 - b. Like an education, this is a process that will require a number of years. And the reality is, you cannot protect the kind of time needed for spiritual growth without forsaking what used to fill that time – and that can result in forms of hardship.
 - c. And like an education, book learning is limited learning. To gain the kind of practical experience that makes your learning useful in everyday life, you must take your book learning into the real world. But this too is costly, for it takes time, commitment, focus, prayer, and dependence on God for empowerment and help.
 4. The point is – *and I want to make this point without diminishing the hardships endured by Christians in ministry and Christians living a godly life day after day* – the point is, you cannot pursue godliness of heart, mind, mouth, and behavior without enduring serious hardships and paying a high price – hardships and a price no one wants to pay when calculated from a worldly or fleshly perspective.
 5. However, the outcome of this pursuit includes God's blessings, genuine joy, inward peace, wisdom for daily living, a restful heart and mind, freedom from the effects of stress, and a confidence that you are safe in God's hands.
 6. Therefore, even though the path to get here is full of challenges and hardship, it leads to the abundant life promised to us by Jesus Christ, himself.

III. Conclusion

- A. A man was badly wounded in his right hand. When he tried cleaning the wound, the pain was such that he quit and wrapped it with bandages. Not wanting to endure more pain, he left it wrapped – which allowed infection to set in. Not only did the infection eat away at the flesh in his hand, it sent the infection surging through his body. Finally, being sick enough to admit he needed help, he turned to the medical profession who wanted to remove part of his hand and pump him with antibiotics. Not wanting to lose his hand, he took the antibiotics and hoped for the

best – which never came. He died of sepsis. **Was this man wise or foolish?**

- B. A Christian was willingly living a compromised life – creating wounds that needed cleaning and areas of flesh that needed removing. Not wanting to endure the pain of such procedures, he chose to wrap them with bandages and hope for the best ... and I think you can figure the rest out from here.