

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 God's exhortation to willingly pay the price of being involved in some form of Christian ministry, and the cost of being a regular Christian, and the cost of doing battle with ourselves in order to become a mature, godly Christian. Today, we will consider the Christian life in relation to Priorities, Playing by the rules, and Rewards.

C. Prayer

II. Priorities, Playing by the rules, Rewards

A. **PRIORITIES:** [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.

1. Given the context, it seems obvious that this verse refers to believers who are in some kind of full-time Christian ministry.

a. And the purpose for these words is to show the importance of establishing and maintaining sensible **priorities** – especially in relation to being single-minded, prepared, and ready to jump into action with a moment's notice. Why? Because proper priorities are vital to carrying out the tasks of full-time ministry in a way that pleases God.

b. However, most of us are not in full-time Christian ministry, yet to live godly in thought, word, and deed, **all the time**, requires establishing and maintaining sensible **priorities** – the kind of priorities that help us maintain single-mindedness,

preparedness, and the ability to think godly, speak godly, and behave godly – regardless of the situation or the strength of the temptation being faced.

- c. Therefore, we are going to look at the importance of living a sensibly prioritized Christian life.
2. **Vs 4** begins with, “**No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life.**” In other words, no believer involved in full-time Christian ministry entangles himself – or gets so involved in the affairs of everyday life that his entanglements restrict his ability to carry out his duties.
 - a. And yet, Paul supported himself by making tents. Was that an entanglement, or did he prioritize his time well enough to keep his tent making from interfering with his work as a missionary and giving oversight to a number of churches?
 - b. It is my belief that Paul maintained the kind of **priorities** that enabled him to make the best use of his time so that his income producing activities did not hinder his ministry duties.
 - c. And that kind of **prioritizing** is what I am encouraging you to develop and maintain in order to make measurable and commendable progress in living a godly life and in loving those around you as you ought to love them.
3. However, this is not as easy to do as it is to say. **WHY?** Because most of the children and all the adults here today are already entangled in the affairs of everyday life. Consider –
 - a. The young people are entangled in things like school work, chores around the house, play time, hobbies, reading for pleasure, and video games.
 - b. The adults are entangled in things like household chores, caring for their house, yard, and vehicles, raising children, earning income, shopping, exercising, socializing with extended family and friends, and helping those who need our help.
 - c. And these lists – which are far from exhaustive – do not include personal hygiene time, sleep time, computer time, phone calls, and the many things that unexpectedly intrude on our time.
4. Now I want to be clear, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with the things on these lists. Many of them are necessary involvements, and beneficial to our well-being, and even the godly thing to do.
5. Therefore, our challenge is not the lists, but the priority of the things on the lists. Which raises the question: “What priorities are at the top of your list? And, what is your number one priority?”

- a. This is important, because who or what is at the top of your list affects how you prioritize the rest of the things on your list.
 - b. Which raises two questions: “Is God the number one priority on your list – not just when you need Him or when nothing else is more pressing – but all the time? Have you made pleasing God a priority?”
 - c. The reality is, if you will make God the supreme priority on your list of things to do, you will find it much easier to prioritize the rest of your list in ways that protect time for making measurable and commendable progress in living a godly life and in loving those around us as you ought.
6. I realize much more can be said about this issue, but for the sake of time, and in an effort to promote thinking, self-evaluation, prayer, and Bible study on your part regarding your priorities, we will conclude this portion of our teaching with –
- a. **1 Corinthians 9:24-27**, “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. [25] Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable (*If we are committed to winning, then we will know how to prioritize everything else*). [26] Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; [27] but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.”
 - b. May God and pleasing Him be the two priorities that influence how we prioritize the rest of the things on our list of things to do.

B. PLAYING BY THE RULES: [5] Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules.

1. There are those who do not think we need to take this verse too seriously, because – after all – we are saved by grace. However, God’s word is not as accommodating to this perspective as those who hold it think it is.
2. The reality is, **vs 5** is not an exaggeration meant to scare us into compliance, but rather, it presents a truth that we ought to pay attention to.
 - a. And the **first reason** to take this verse seriously is the imagery used. We are compared to an athlete who is competing in the Olympics, or at least in a competition that is at that level.

- b. In our day, an Olympic athlete has to submit to blood and urine testing to ensure he hasn't used illegal drugs to gain an advantage – because gaining such an advantage is against the rules, just as cheating during the event is against the rules. And breaking the rules results in disqualification.
- 3. A **second reason** to take this verse seriously is the warning found in **1 Corinthians 3:8-15** regarding Christian ministers who lead their followers astray by misrepresenting the word of God. Though these ministers do not lose their salvation, they do lose any rewards they might have been given had they accurately taught God's word (*they are saved yet though as through fire*).
- 4. A **third reason** to take this verse seriously comes from **Galatians 6:7-8**, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. [8] For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."
- 5. A **fourth reason** is the Blessings and Curses found in **Deut. 28**, which provide clear and practical examples of what happens to us individually and to our nation as a whole when we play by the rules (*keep God's laws*) and when we break the rules (*disobey God's laws*).
- 6. Other examples from scripture of rules that when kept bring reward and when broken bring loss –
 - a. *The rule for receiving the gift of eternal life: **John 3:36**, He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.*
 - (1) **Matthew 7:21-23**, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. [22] Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' (*We thought we were playing by the rules!*) [23] And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" (*But they were not playing by the rule of obedience.*)
 - b. *Rules for receiving mercy, forgiveness, and material blessings from God: The scripture says the merciful will receive mercy (**Matthew 5:7**); those who forgive will be forgiven, but those who do not forgive will not be forgiven (**Matthew 6:14-15**); and those who give generously will receive generously from the Lord (**Luke 6:38**).*

- c. *A rule for knowing and experiencing God's presence with and in us: **John 14:21,23**, He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him. [23] If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.*
 - d. *A rule for receiving rewards in the next life that last for eternity: This rule comes from Jesus' parable about the talents as found in **Matthew 25:14-30**, where eternal rewards were given to those who used their abilities – and I am adding assets, possessions and time – to build and enlarge God's kingdom on the earth. But those who did not use their abilities, assets, possessions and time to build God's kingdom while living in this world lost out.*
7. The important truth in all of this is: if we are going to be given the gift of eternal life, walk with God and enjoy His presence in this life, receive God's blessings in this life, and receive eternal rewards in the next life, we must play by God's rules.
 - a. The wonderful reality is, righteousness in thought, word, and deed has its rewards – both in this life and the next.
 - b. While unrighteousness, though seemingly rewarding at first, brings suffering, loss, destruction, and death.
 8. This brings us to the third and final topic in today's teaching.

C. **REWARDS:** [6] The **hard-working** farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops.

1. The hard work of living a godly life pays off – just as the hard work of doing well in school or in your marriage or at work pays off.
 - a. God will reward us – in this life and the next – if we will believe in, rely on, and proceed forward in making use of His empowerment and help to bear the burdens and pay the price of growing in godliness, advancing in spiritual maturity, and being a Christian witness.
 - b. God will reward us for helping others learn and grow by passing on to them what we have learned and know.
 - c. God will reward us for persevering in and bearing the cost of doing battle with ourselves in order to remove what ought not to be in us and put Christ-likeness in its place.

- d. God will reward us for establishing and maintaining godly priorities in order to live a life that is pleasing to Him.
2. The reality is, God rewards everyone who lives the Christian life according to the rules He established for living such a life. And some of these rewards are ours to be enjoyed in this life, while others will only be enjoyed in eternity.
3. And though there isn't time for an exhaustive list, let me mention a few rewards that money cannot buy and personal effort cannot gain:
 - a. Inward peace and a settled joy regardless of the circumstances.
 - b. A settled faith that knows you are safe in God's hands – a sense of safety that frees you from fretting over things like unmet needs, protection, financial security, and what others think of you.
 - c. Comfort in sorrow, security in God's justice when being treated unjustly, and wisdom when asked for – just to name a few.
4. We should not diminish the part that God-given rewards can play in motivating us to live a God pleasing life. Therefore, may we never forget that the hard work of pursuing godliness and living the Christian life pays off – in this life and in the next.

III. Conclusion

- A. Paul concludes this section of **2 Timothy 2** by saying in **vs 7**, “Consider what I say (*in verses 1-6*), for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.”
 1. In this context, to **consider** what Paul is saying is to carefully examine it; to think about it and ponder its meaning and significance for living the Christian life; and to seek understanding as to how you can apply it to your life in the most practical ways possible.
 2. Obviously, this takes time and effort. And should you need some ideas as to how to go about considering **vs 1-6**, the words from **Proverbs 2:2-6** can provide those ideas.
 3. **Proverbs 2:2-6**, “(1) Make your ear attentive to wisdom, (2) incline your heart to understanding; [3] (3) for **IF** you cry for discernment, [and] lift your voice for understanding; [4] **IF** you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; [5] **THEN** you will discern the fear of the LORD and discover the knowledge of God. [6] For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.”