

Message #7

II Timothy 2:3-7

Years ago an article appeared in Time magazine that really captured the heart of the Olympics. “The Olympics are a celebration of instants; not just milliseconds ticking away on every scoreboard...but 15 years of determination turned on a single moment. Look away...for an instant, make one wrong move, have one moment of sentiment and 10,000 hours of practice are gone. In the Olympics an athlete comes into the spotlight for a second and then, in most cases, disappears into oblivion. Make one error in competition and the Olympic competitor can have a lifetime of regret.”

When it comes to Olympic competition, all that an athlete has worked for, dreamed about and invested in can either be won or lost in one moment. Not just anyone can win a gold medal. When one stands on that podium with that medal hanging on their neck and the national anthem is being played, all the world is literally looking at the best in the world. The two and three a day workouts; the dietary restrictions; the cross-training; the hours of coaching, reading, studying and watching films finally pays off for the one who wins.

One gold medalist was once asked, how long did you prepare for this race? His answer was “a lifetime.” There is only one way to get that gold medal—you must earn it in competition. You do not get to the podium by chance or emotion. You get there by hard work, discipline and dedication.

We are in a critical section of Paul’s final letter to Timothy. Paul wanted Timothy to finish a winner. He wanted him to finish an award-winner. He did not want Timothy just to compete as a believer and minister; but to win as a believer and minister. What Paul says in these verses is this:

THE BELIEVER WHO WILL WIN THE AWARDS OF GOD IN HEAVEN WILL BE ONE WHO DISCIPLINED HIMSELF/HERSELF AND DEMONSTRATED AWARD-WINNING QUALITIES IN LIFE ON EARTH.

We are in a specific section of Scripture in which Paul is using a series of metaphors to communicate that very point to Timothy. **Now a metaphor is a figure of speech that attributes the quality of something to something else in order to make a point.**

For example, the first metaphor we saw last time was that Paul wanted Timothy to finish as a strong son. Paul called Timothy “my son.” Now Timothy was not Paul’s literal physical son; but he was Paul’s son in the sense that he had singled him out and entrusted him with his instruction and teaching. Through Paul’s teaching, which came to Timothy via his grandmother and mother, he came to faith and developed in the faith. Paul says you are my son and I want you to be a strong son. To be a strong son, Timothy needed to be strong in the doctrine of the grace of God. He needed to carefully understand Paul’s teaching and doctrine and he needed to teach Pauline grace to “faithful men,” who would be able to teach others.

METAPHOR #1 – The award-winning believer will live and minister as a good soldier.

2:3-4

The adjective “good” (kalos) is one that means Paul wanted Timothy to be an excellent soldier, one who is noble and honorable and beautiful (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 228-229). Now the truth is every believer is in war so in some respects we could say every believer is a soldier. God does not want us being just any kind of soldier; he wants us being a “good soldier.”

In **verses 3-4**, he specifically points out the qualities of a good soldier. There are three qualities brought out about a “good soldier”:

Quality #1 - A good soldier endures hardship. **2:3a**

Being a soldier is tough business. There is training, there is discipline, and there are hard things. The words “endure hardship” mean that a good soldier is one that will be willing to put up with his share of adversity, ill treatment and affliction. He will not quit, he will not give up and he will not abandon his responsibilities. A good soldier is tough even when conditions are tough. Good soldiers do not complain and they do not run. They fight a good fight.

Years ago I read an account of a soldier who received tremendous honor for his amazing actions in Viet Nam. On one occasion many of his men were being killed by a couple of men in a machine gun nest located some 50 yards in front of them. He himself had suffered a wound and he knew if he did not do something, one by one his men would all be killed. He was carrying a sawed-off 12-gauge shotgun and he loaded it with slugs and he said to another soldier I want you to keep firing at that machine gun and do not stop shooting until I get to that nest. He charged the nest and when he reached it, his 12-gauge pump sounded like an automatic and he destroyed all of the enemy. Now there is one tough Davidic-type soldier who is honorable and deserves honor. He kept fighting a good fight when things were tough. Adversity and difficulty did not stop him.

John Calvin said I look around Christianity and every day I see believers and ministers who did not endure. He said I see believers who quit when things get tough. They throw away their weapons; they become effeminate and they shrink from the warfare. Calvin said these kinds of soldiers will never finish honored soldiers in the sight of God.

Honorable soldiers endure hardships. Honorable soldiers keep fighting a good fight until the end.

Quality #2 - A good soldier is not worldly entangled. **2:4a**

The words “worldly entangled” are words that mean a good soldier does not get all entwined or wrapped up in the things of civilian life. A man in war must keep his focus on the warfare and if he doesn’t, the end result can be devastating.

When we were fighting a war in Iraq, a girl from Michigan went for a Sunday afternoon drive with another soldier near the enemy front. We were in the middle of a war and two lovebirds decide to go for a drive and the end result was they were captured. When the prisoners were released, they received medals. In my opinion, the medal they should have received is a medal for stupidity. Honorable soldiers who win medals do not get all wrapped up in worldly things.

Theodosius, the Roman Emperor in A.D. 379, who wrote the Roman code for the Roman military, said, “We forbid men engaged in military service to engage in civilian service.” A soldier’s job is war.

If we get all tangled up with the things of this world, we will not be an effective soldier for Jesus Christ. The more we bog ourselves down with this world, the less effective we will be. Honorable soldiers for God never lose sight of the will of God. An honorable soldier will not be conformed to this world but will be transformed from this world by the renewing of their minds on the Word of God. Honorable soldiers are not worldly soldiers; they are godly soldiers.

Quality #3 - A good soldier is a superior pleaser. **2:4b**

A Roman soldier of Paul’s day took an oath called the “Sacramentum.” In that oath, the soldier promised to be loyal to the emperor and to do everything that he could to win every skirmish for Rome.

Roman soldiers were dedicated to their emperor and to Rome. To be chosen to serve in the Roman military was considered to be an appointment to great honor. Soldiers who served their commanders and units faithfully were honored in their retirement years.

What Paul is saying to Timothy is if you are to be a good soldier, you must make your goal pleasing Jesus Christ. Good soldiers will have that as their goal. Paul wanted Timothy to be a strong son and a good soldier.

METAPHOR #2 – The award-winning believer will live and minister as a winning athlete. **2:5**

Paul was a man who had an interest in athletics (i.e. II Tim. 4:7). This is a metaphor he often uses in his writings to communicate things about the Christian life. The Greek games were famous in Paul’s day and Paul was well acquainted with those games. Now Paul wanted Timothy to live and minister as a winning athlete. There are three qualities that he brings out about a winning athlete:

Quality #1 - An award-winning athlete continually competes. **2:5a**

The verb “compete” is the Greek word “athleo” from which we get our English word “athletics.” It is used two times in this verse and the first use of it is in the present tense. What this means is that an award-winning athlete is one who will be continually and habitually competing.

Now the actual word “compete” means to compete and contend in a game or contest. It carries with it the idea of contending continually in the competition. An award-winning athlete stays in the game and continually competes. He does not win every event. There are moments in every athlete’s life when he loses and fails; but he continues to compete and that is exactly the point.

One of the most amazing sports stories in the history of the Olympics is the story of Dan Jansen. He was the fastest speed skater in the world. He literally set eight speed skating world records. He first went to the Olympics in 1988 but he ended up falling in two competitions and he did not get a medal. Then he went back to the Olympics in 1992 and again he lost. Finally, he went back to the Olympics in 1996 and it came down to the final 1000 meter speed skate and he won the gold. You must admire Dan Jansen. Even though he had his share of defeats, he did not quit; he kept competing and he won.

That is exactly the point Paul is making here. We need to be always competing in life. We need to be intensely focused on staying in the New Testament Grace Age church action because in the end we will win.

Quality #2 - An award-winning athlete continually competes to win. **2:5b**

Now award-winning athletes compete to win the prize. They compete, but they are not just interested in competing; they are interested in winning. In fact, if you do win as an athlete, it brings you prestige, position and prosperity.

If you think track clothing is skimpy today, you should have seen it in Paul’s day. Most who competed in the Olympics in the days of Paul did not wear clothing. The reason is they did not want anything to prevent them from winning. For example, if you were in a wrestling competition or running, clothing could cost you or slow you down. So an athlete would get rid of anything that could potentially prevent the win.

The point of this is that Paul wanted believers to think in terms of not just competing, but competing to win. In Olympics only one gets the gold, but in God’s world those who discipline themselves may each one get the gold.

Back in 1992, the Michigan Wolverines lost the NCAA national championship basketball game to Duke. At the end of that game some of the Michigan players were crying. Coach Fisher was asked what he told his players. He said I told them to go ahead and feel the hurt and shed the tears and remember what this feels like and use that as a basis for getting back here to win it next year.

That is an award-winning philosophy. There will be setbacks and defeats in the Christian life. Every believer will have his or her share of losses and failures; but in those moments when there are those tears of repentance, the award-winner will get back up and get back on track and continue to compete to win. Failures for an award-winner will be part of the training process to keep striving to finally win.

Quality #3 - An award-winning athlete continually competes by the rules. **2:5c**

Those who win in any sport must play by the rules or they are disqualified. So it is in the Christian life; award-winning believers must compete by God's rules which are found in God's Word. In other words, we must strive to compete in the Christian life by following **the Grace Age rule book**, which is the Word of God.

Now one may take the position I'll compete my way. I'll compete by keeping the Law. I'll compete by my own rules; in fact, I don't need the Word of God and I don't need the church. Well you cannot possibly win. You will not finish an award-winner.

Those of us who have followed the Olympics for many years will never forget the 1988 Olympics. Ben Johnson out-sprinted Carl Lewis in the 100 meter race and he won. Later it was discovered that Johnson used a steroid drug, which is not allowed by Olympic rules and, as a result, he lost all his rewards. No matter what the sport, whether it is baseball or the Tour de France bike race, there are always those who try to win by not obeying the rules. They do not win. They are disqualified.

So it is with God. If we are going to win rewards, we must play by the Pauline grace rules.

METAPHOR #3 – The award-winning believer will live and minister as a reaping farmer. **2:6**

There is a big difference between a person who farms and a person who farms and reaps. Last year we planted a garden and we reaped weeds. But down the road from us is a farmer who reaped great crops. In fact, he makes his living at it.

There are two main qualities brought out about a reaping farmer:

Quality #1 - A reaping farmer is a hard worker. **2:6a**

Those words "hard working" mean exactly that. A reaping farmer is a hard worker who, at times, works to the point of being weary. It takes great effort and toil and determination to be a reaping farmer. There is much involved and there is a lot of hard work involved.

You have to understand the soil. You must prepare the soil, plow the soil, plant the crops, weed the ground, irrigate the crops, harvest the crops and market the crops. You have to fix equipment and maintain equipment. That is a lot of hard work.

From the outside, farming looks somewhat glamorous. You work your own hours. You get to see some beautiful country. You get to drive luxurious tractors and you get to see direct fruit as a result of your labors. But behind a successful farmer is a lot of hard work. There are many long and lonely hours of hard work behind a fruitful ministry.

Quality #2 - A reaping farmer is a first fruit partaker. **2:6b**

There have been four opinions as to what this means:

- 1) The minister must first partake of the spiritual fruit before he can produce it.
- 2) The minister must first labor before he can enjoy the fruit. If a minister stays at it and faithfully ministers, he will see a multiplication of fruit.
- 3) The minister should be paid first from the fruit he had produced. As Paul said, one who works hard at preaching and teaching is to be financially supported and not muzzled (I Tim. 5:17-18).
- 4) The minister who first labors will be abundantly rewarded. God will eventually reward the minister who labors hard.

Dr. Henry Alford, the Greek scholar, calls this “the rite of first participation.” A farmer has a right to do whatever he wants to do with the fruit of his work.

In **verse 7**, Paul says consider what I am saying here with these metaphors and the Lord will give you the ability to understand it and apply it to your life and ministry.

Now that is interesting. Understanding and applying God’s Word in a way that makes you an award-winner is not just an academic reading of the Bible or some mental achievement. “The Lord” must give understanding.

No one can be an award-winner without relying on the Lord.