

Being a Faithful Christian and a Good Soldier of Jesus Christ

2 Timothy 2:3-4

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Background Notes

One of Paul's primary purposes for writing 2 Timothy was to encourage Timothy in sharing the faith. Timothy was a solid believer but he was not an upfront, courageous, self-motivated kind of person. Timothy needed to be encouraged to keep moving forward. I'm sure some of us can identify with Timothy's personality type. So Paul wrote to Timothy to encourage him - to stir up his spiritual gift, to be courageous in the faith, and to be dedicated to his call to Christian service.

In chapter 2 Paul gave Timothy several models as illustrations of what the dedicated Christian life is all about. These models are for us, as well as for Timothy, because this is not only Paul's 1st century letter to Timothy - it's God's Word to us today!

Each model Paul gave here emphasized a different aspect of the dedicated life of a faithful Christian. In verses 3-4, we have the model of the soldier. I believe that the primary idea in the model of the soldier is **sacrifice**. Remember, Paul was picturing a Roman soldier of the 1st century. There was no idea in his mind of the 20th century US military ad that proclaims, “Join the Army and see the world!” In the Roman army there was no promotional feature of joining the military to get a free college education! No, the primary idea in this model of the soldier is **sacrifice**.

Doctrinal Points

1. Like a soldier, the faithful Christian sacrifices his life of ease.

Verse 3: *“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”*

The good soldier endures hardship. Remember, the Roman soldier of the 1st century is in view here, but even today hardship characterizes the life of a soldier. Thankfully, at the present time our country is not involved in a war, but there are still hardships to be endured in the military. Separation from family when posted to other countries or deployed on a naval vessel is a serious hardship.

As part of my ROTC military training, I went through a summer boot camp. It was not easy. I had to endure some hardship. For example, eating and sleeping out in the rain was not fun. Once I had to clean out the grease trap of an army mess hall. It was an underground cistern, and to clean it I had to climb down into it and scrape the grease off the walls. Definitely not the most enjoyable job - but orders are orders. The good soldier endures hardship.

The good soldier sacrifices a life of ease. Just as a good soldier sacrifices a life of ease, so does the faithful Christian. The faithful Christian may have to sacrifice some TV time. The faithful Christian may have to sacrifice some leisure reading time. The faithful Christian may have to sacrifice some sports time. The faithful Christian may have to sacrifice many of “the good life” times. The Lord will surely reward faithful soldiers for whatever sacrifice they make for Him - but remember, like a soldier, the faithful Christian sacrifices his life of ease.

When I was preparing this sermon yesterday, the U.S. Open Tennis tournament was being played. If you watch the matches on TV an awful amount of time can be consumed – but if you like tennis (as I do), you want to see what’s going on. But there I was, working on my sermon that included sacrificing TV time! Yet I very much wanted to see some of the play - and at least know the score. I went through a little struggle there!

In reality, that’s what it boils down to. If you’re involved in the things of the Lord, you’re going to have to sacrifice your life of ease to faithfully fulfill your service as a Christian soldier. God’s not a killjoy - but you’re going to have to set up a priority list. And sometimes this will include sacrificing the life of ease. Like a soldier, the faithful Christian sacrifices his life of ease.

2. Like a soldier, the faithful Christian sacrifices his security.

Verse 4: *“No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life.”*

The soldier that’s in view here is on active duty; he’s not on leave during peacetime. A soldier who is on active duty cannot be entangled in the affairs of this life. He must be able to move out and obey orders at a moment’s notice. He can’t be tied down with a lot of entanglements. He must be streamlined. The Roman soldier had to cut loose from anything in civilian life he was holding on to for financial security.

Like a soldier, the faithful Christian sacrifices his financial security - his earthly security. We are to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, not on this earth (Matthew 6). This doesn’t mean that a faithful Christian can’t have a regular job. (After all, 2 Thessalonians 3:10 says that if a man won’t work, he shouldn’t be allowed to eat!) But it does mean that we shouldn’t be held back from serving the Lord by earthly job entanglements.

Most of our earthly entanglements have to do with our earthly security – our investments, our possessions, our careers. All these things take time and energy away from our service as Christian soldiers. Like a soldier, the faithful Christian sacrifices his security. Let's try not to get so entangled with the things of this earth. We simply don't have the time for getting involved in worldly things, so let's try to be more streamlined. Earthly responsibilities, yes. Earthly entanglements, no.

Every earthly entanglement saps away time and energy that we could give to the Lord. Did you ever notice that? The more things you're tied up with, the less time you have for the Lord. Your time and energy is sapped away. We should try to be more streamlined.

If there's any one piece of advice I could give to Christian young couples that want to be able to serve the Lord, it would be: "Try to stay streamlined!" Every attachment you get, every connection you have – how much energy is it going to take away from the Lord and from serving Him? Does this connection somehow produce more for the Lord – or does it take away valuable time and energy? Try to be more streamlined!

3. Like a soldier, the faithful Christian sacrifices his independence.

Verse 4: *"That he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier."*

The goal and reward for the Roman soldier was to please the Roman emperor in whose army he served. The Roman soldier was single minded. He submitted his will. He obeyed orders - even when he didn't understand them, and even when he didn't like them. He didn't do his own thing. He sacrificed his independence.

What about us? Are we good soldiers? Have we submitted our wills to the Lord? Do we obey His marching orders? Even when we may not completely understand them? Even when we don't like them? Is the bottom line motive in our lives to please our Commander in Chief?

2 Corinthians 5:9 says, *"We make it our aim to be well pleasing to Him."* Like a soldier, a faithful Christian sacrifices his independence.

Practical Applications

1. Are we going to Heaven as Christian soldiers - or Christian pleasure-seekers?

Remember, once again: God is not a killjoy. He has given us everything richly to enjoy (1 Timothy 6). But this passage emphasizes that He's looking for soldiers, not pleasure-seekers.

To get a handle on this, let's ask ourselves this question – how do we go about structuring our lives as Christians? Do we structure our lives around the traditional American weekend filled with events of pleasure - going to the beach, going to the football game, going to a party or BBQ - and then we add in any leftover time with our Christian activities? Or do we structure our lives as Christians around the Lord's work first, and then the events of pleasure are worked in as time and schedules allow?

Think it through. The end result can be quite different. Are we going to Heaven as Christian soldiers - or as Christian pleasure-seekers?

2. Let's be real soldiers, not toy soldiers.

By toy soldiers, we mean soldiers that just look like soldiers - but they're not real. Toy soldiers are easily manipulated by the person who is setting them up or playing with them. Toy soldiers don't really fight; they just look like they're fighting. Toy soldiers are pushovers. Toy soldiers are only part time - only when they're out on display. Are you a real soldier, or a toy soldier?

Maybe our first question should be - have you even signed up for the Lord's army? Or, to carry the metaphor further, are you still looking tentatively at the recruiting poster?

In order to enlist in the Lord's army, you must trust in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. It's the only way. That's the only way into the Lord's army. Once you've trusted Christ as your Savior, then the question is: Now are you going to be a toy soldier, or a hard-working, sacrificing Christian soldier?

God can't use toy soldiers for spreading His kingdom. He wants real soldiers in His army - soldiers who are willing to work hard and sacrifice. Let's be real soldiers – not toy soldiers - for the Lord!