

Attitudes for Life

Over the past couple of months I've felt that God has been dealing with attitudes - His been changing mind-sets. An attitude is a settled way of thinking or feeling about someone or something, typically one that is reflected in a person's behaviour. Therefore, if you can change a person's attitudes you can change their behaviour. It's so important that you adopt the right attitude (have the right spirit), if you are going to create an environment where God's blessings can flow.

In **2 Timothy 2** the apostle Paul highlights three very important points concerning attitudes. He illustrates the dynamic assignments every believer will face, and does this by using metaphors involving a **soldier**, an **athlete** and a **farmer**. You will notice that Paul's first piece of advice is to **"endure hardship as a good soldier."**

However, three distinct attributes are commended; they are the three "d's" - duty, discipline and diligence;

(a) The **duty** of a good soldier (active duty).

(b) The **discipline** of an athlete.

(c) The **diligence** as a farmer.

Note all three vocations are important enough for Paul to declare... **"Consider what I say, and the Lord will give you insight in all things" [verse 7]**. Let's read verses 1 to 13.....

The Good Soldier - DUTY

In Paul's writings we often find him applying military language when referring to himself, his friends or the church at large. By using this terminology here, Paul was confirming to Timothy the high level of commitment God expects from him, and in turn, from us. When Paul says to Timothy, **"endure hardship (hardness) as a good soldier,"** he's actually conveying a very strong message. Paul is saying, "Be as committed as a good soldier!" Duty and commitment are synonymous when in service to God.

The Greek word used for "endure hardness" implies two things. (a) Enduring something bad, dreadful, wicked or vile, and (b) enduring mental pressures caused by adverse circumstances. Therefore, 'enduring hardship' necessitates you having the right attitude. You must have a real sense of duty, that is, be committed enough to God's cause so that you can stand your ground when the going gets tough. A good soldier is formidable, and he is fit, excellent and capable. He possesses all the right virtues – he is very skilled, fierce and disciplined.

Note the soldier described in this verse is one who is on active duty. What's more, he appears to be in the thick of battle. No soldier in such harsh circumstances entangles himself with the affairs of civil-life. Rather than ensnaring himself with civilian matters, the good soldier dedicates himself wholeheartedly to the business of the military. In like manner, the warfare of God's kingdom demands your full attention and focus.

First, you must be dedicated and committed to your commanding officer, and thereafter fully committed to winning the battle. The emphasis in this verse is on the word *entangle*. A good soldier does not allow the ordinary affairs of civilian life to become the main object of his existence. A soldier on active duty always keeps himself in readiness to take orders from his commanding officer. His sole objective is to please the one who has enlisted him.

In times of trouble, he will have to face his fears and accept any inconvenience. Like this soldier, your service to Christ should monopolise the most prominent areas in your life. Therefore, you need to keep your normal pre-occupations and daily distractions at bay. You should enduringly and endearingly serve the Author and Finisher of your faith - your Commanding Officer Jesus Christ.

Verse 12, ***“If we endure*** (bear up courageously), ***we will also reign with Him.***” The original Greek implies, *“If we endure regardless, we will also reign and rule like nobility with Him.”* Pleasing your commanding officer enables you to rule with Him and share the very position of nobility and dignity that He has. ***“For you have need to endure*** (bear up courageously), ***so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise”*** (Hebrews 10:36).

By being “on-duty” at all times, and fully committed to His cause, you will receive the promise. Notice that the blessings (the promises) are received on the battle field.

The Athlete - DISCIPLINE

The prerequisite for winning any race is ‘abiding by the rules’. An athlete must play by the rules otherwise he will forfeit the prize. If an athlete breaks the rules he will be disqualified. Therefore, this illustration is stressing the necessity of self-discipline. If you are to remain “on-duty” and receive your reward, you must practise self-control.

A good athlete is disciplined in his training (preparation) and is fixed on winning the prize, so he plans his race accordingly. He plans to win! **1 Corinthians 9:24** states, ***“Do you know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.”***

In 1st Corinthians chapter 9, the athlete is a *runner*, and then later in the passage, he is a *wrestler*. But both sports require self-discipline and strenuous effort on the part of the athlete. They also demand that attention be paid (by the athlete) to the purpose of entering in the competition in the first place. The main purpose is to win. *“Run in such a way as to win!”* Suggesting that we should all run to win - run as winners, not losers. And note the prize is given for *faithful* effort - nothing else! (Discipline + determination = prize).

Too many of you are hung up on the details of the race - on the procedures. But in order to win you must focus on the winning post and have your eye on the prize. Procedures won't win you the race.

Verse 25 - Anyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. A wrestler once asked his coach, “Can't I smoke and drink and have a good time and still wrestle?” The coach replied, “Yes, you can, but you can't win!” As Paul thinks of the contestants at the games, he sees the winner stepping up to receive the prize. What is it? It is a perishable crown, a garland of flowers, a wreath of leaves that will soon wither away. But in contrast he also sees an imperishable crown which will be awarded to all those who have been faithful and committed in their service to Jesus Christ.

Verse 26 - This service to Christ is neither purposeless nor ineffectual. You must have a definite target before your eyes, and you should make every action count. Beating the air gets you nowhere! When wrestling, there should be no wasted time or misdirected energy, and you shouldn't be interested in any wild misses. Rather, as you engage, you must have clear purpose and definite direction. What are you aiming at?

Verse 27 - Instead you must discipline your body and bring it under control. Too many Christians drop out of the race or are disqualified because they didn't maintain an unquestioning obedience to the word of God. Many of you may not reach the finishing post because of your lack of self-control. You must practice self-

mastery. What is this you may ask? It is keeping you flesh under and allowing the Spirit of God in you to take control. It is restraining yourself so that the Holy Spirit can have full control.

Here are some important guidelines:

[a] You should be fit - able or skilful.

[b] You must not fight with carnal weapons.

[c] You must keep yourself pure.

[d] You should be patient - mature.

The Hardworking Farmer - DILIGENCE

A farmer is the person who tills the soil and raises food. This was one of the major occupations in ancient times. The soil-worker was responsible for all aspects of farming. The ploughing, planting, tending, and harvesting was done by the farmer and his family. In the New Testament a farmer is one who either owns the land or rents it in order to raise crops. Jesus refers to Himself as the *true vine* and His Father as the *vinedresser* (the farmer).

Note a farmer must first plough the ground before he reaps a crop. But if he does, he is guaranteed the reward - *a bountiful harvest*. And, according to all the principles of righteousness, the one who has laboured to bring forth the crops has a right to participate in them first. It's *hard work* that brings this reward, nothing else! So many people whinge at hard work, and especially when it's hard work in God's kingdom. Yet, surely when doing anything for God it should be an absolute pleasure! Stop telling everyone how much you given up or sacrificed for God. This doesn't impress Him. Obedience is greater than sacrifice.

A soldier must endure hardship; the athlete must be disciplined and keep the rules; but the farmer must work hard. The Greek word translated farmer literally means "one who ploughs and prepares the soil for seed." Here, Paul clearly describes the farmer as being *hardworking*. In other words, "a soil-worker that truly labours." Again, the Greek word implies 'the hardest type of work' and is not referring to regular pursuits, but instead, *blood, sweat and tears*! The word denotes a laborious and often painful toil, or a toil that results in weariness. Ancient / age-old farming wasn't done by sophisticated machinery but individually and by hand.

When writing this verse, the apostle Paul desired to paint a picture of a soil-worker who was prepared to suffer much discomfort, and even pain, so that he may be the first to receive a share of the crop. There's no "Midas touch!" This attitude calls for spadework in the heat of the midday sun; turning over dry soil that's hard as clay; and getting grubby and dusty in the process. God requires you to apply good farming principles in all matters of life, therefore, *hard work* is a necessity if you are to enjoy the full harvest. And remember, the *hardworking farmer* eats first and everyone else eats after him! Where are you in the harvest line?

KEY = Soldier sees the victory; athlete sees the prize; and the farmer sees the harvest. They all "saw" through the eyes of faith, and had the right attitude and right behaviour. So don't fall into the trap of being comfortable with bad behaviour. Change your attitudes and you'll change your behaviour. Do it at any cost. It's forth it!