

4. Be strong in the grace

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What kind of words would describe a stereo type of Christian life from the unbeliever's viewpoint? Starting with fanatic, religious, boring, no fun, no alcohol, no smoking, no cussing, no-this, no-that, etc. Unbelievers assume that we Christians don't have a life and living a most boring and lousy third class life.

To tell the truth, without question, the Christian life is the greatest life anyone could ever live. And why is that? Allow me to bring up three points to you:

1) When a person becomes a born-again Christian, God takes a life that was empty, aimless and headed toward certain judgment, and turns it around and transforms it.

He forgives us of all of our sin, and if that wasn't enough, credits the very righteousness of Jesus Christ into our spiritual bank account.

2) He removes all of our guilt, and fills the void in our lives with Himself, as He literally takes up residence in the very center of who we are.

3) Most importantly, He changes our eternal address from a place called hell to a place called heaven.

Tell me that is not a great life to live. The carnal pleasure we can get in this world cannot possibly replace our eternal joy in heaven with Jesus Christ.

It's absolutely true that when you trust Christ as Savior, God removes a whole set of problems you used to have – including the nagging guilt and that empty sense of aimlessness in life that used to haunt you.

But we need to understand that there will be a whole new set of problems that will take the place of your old problems. That is because the day that you put your trust in Jesus Christ, you enter into a battle that will last for the rest of your life.

Why? Because not only is there a God who loves you and has a plan for your life, there is also a devil who hates you and wants to destroy your testimony of Jesus, and fiercely opposes God's plan. Did you think that the devil would give you a standing ovation for you to accept Christ into your heart and to be obedient to the commands of Jesus? Absolutely not. The Christian life is not a playground, but a battleground.

In light of this kind of situation, we need to be strong in the grace of Jesus Christ and His righteousness.

A. BE STRONG IN THE GRACE

2 Timothy 2:1 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Paul used this encouraging command to Timothy twenty five time in his epistles. Timothy must had been a person who got timid and discouraged easily, so he needed to be told often "Be strong."

It is the Lord who gives us strength. Humans have limited strength and we get tired or lose interest. But when we rely on the Lord, we have strength beyond our own imagination.

Isaiah 40:31 But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.

Matthew 19:26 But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Note how apostle Paul specifically told Timothy where to get God's strength:

2 Timothy 2:1b be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

This strength in grace is essential for a strong Christian life. Grace here has its simplest theological meaning, as the divine help, the unmerited gift of assistance that comes from God.

Resting in the grace – the unmerited favor of God towards us that is in Christ Jesus – gives a confidence and boldness we could never have. Because we often misunderstand our position in God as being on some sort of probation until He makes up His mind.

From his own experience, Paul explains to us what it is like to receive the strength of God's grace:

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

B. PASSING THE TORCH

2 Timothy 2:2 And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Apostle Paul who was facing his fast approaching execution, wanted Timothy to take the torch and carry the ministry to next generation. He is showing us the pattern of ministry.

In December 1965, pastor Chuck Smith became the pastor of a 25-person congregation of a small church called "Calvary Chapel in Santa Ana, CA. He started to teach the Bible in expository method – verse by verse, chapter by chapter and Book by Book. His congregation started to grow fast. When other churches shunned hippies, pastor Chuck embraced them and taught the Word of God to them.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, those hippies became a group of powerful men of God – such as, Greg Laurie, Steve Mays, Don McClure, Jon Courson, Raul Ries, Mike MacIntosh, Skip Heitzig and more. Soon they went out all over the United States and started their own churches.

Out of Skip Heitzig's church, Calvary Albuquerque, pastor Robert Furrow started his church in Tucson over twenty years ago which became Calvary Tucson. As you know, my wife Karen and I used to attend Calvary Tucson before we started this church here. In other words, I am a fourth generation Calvary Chapel pastor. Now, there are over 1200 Calvary Chapels across America and hundreds more around the world.

It is my heart's desire that out of our church, I hope and pray that some young people who have a great zeal and obedient heart for the Lord Jesus to carry the torch to the next upcoming generation here or elsewhere.

This pattern of ministry is not only applicable to a teaching ministry of each church, but also it applies to all the other ministries. We come and go, but God's ministry on earth will continue.

C. ENDURING THE HARDSHIP

2 Timothy 2:3-4 You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 4 No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

No real soldier – or at least no good soldier – ever gave up simply because some hardship came to them. In the same way, if a believer is not willing to endure hardship, they will never accomplish much for Jesus Christ. They will give up as soon as something hard is required of them. They cannot fulfill Jesus' call.

Matthew 16:24 If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

Paul often used military illustrations in his letters. It is not surprising that since he lived in the Roman military state and was chained to Nero's praetorium guards while he was writing this last letter to Timothy.

Obviously, apostle Paul didn't think that being a pastor or Bible teacher is not an easy job. Some of you may think that I only work a few hours a week – Sunday mornings and Thursday nights. What you may not know is that my study hours for two teachings are from 24 to 34 hours.

Think about our soldiers in Afghanistan, Iraq or wherever in harm's way. If they would leave their posts because their sleeping quarters are not like their own home, how many soldiers would there be? None. That is a part of being a soldier – willing to endure hardship or even give up one's life to accomplish the mission that is given to him. If a soldier is not willing to give up personal comfort, he is not a soldier at all.

Once you become a believer and follower of Jesus Christ, whether you like it or not, you are enlisted as a soldier for Christ. You no longer live for yourself, but for Jesus Christ who is our Commander of all heaven's armies. We owe total obedience to Him for what He has done for us.

D. FOLLOWING THE RULES

2 Timothy 2:5 And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

In this verse, apostle Paul uses the world of athletics for illustration of the Christian life as he did in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians. If he was born now, he would be totally into football games, don't you think?

An athlete cannot make up the rules as he please for his own benefit. He must compete according to the rules if he wants to receive the prize.

I am sure that you all have heard a saying, "Rules are made to be broken." I heard another good one by late General Douglas MacArthur in response to that: "Rules are mostly made to be broken and are too often for the lazy to hide behind."

Many of us would argue that we can break the rule depending on the situation. That might be true in some situations from the humanistic view point. But not in God's rule book – the Bible. When you and I break what He tells us to do, we are going against who is always right and always holy. That leaves us to be wrong and unholy. And there is no excuse for that.

How many renowned athletics have lost their Olympic medals or titles because they chose not to play by the rules! How many godly men and women have lost their testimonies of Jesus Christ because they chose not to follow the commands of Jesus Christ that are written in this Book, the Bible!

John 15:10-11 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you that My joy remains in you and your joy may be full.

The truth of this Book, the commandments of the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are not negotiable, nor do they change because we are in a different culture, continent, century or civilization. They are timeless and borderless because they apply to the core of sinful human nature, not ideology nor politics.

E. WORKING HARD PATIENTLY

2 Timothy 2:6-7 The hard-working farmer must be first to partake of the crops. 7 Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.

Here is Paul's another favorite image – farmer. He taught us through the Holy Spirit that all the believers should work together in plowing, sowing, watering or harvesting. God alone gives the increase according to 1 Corinthians 3.

Three things we must notice in this farmer illustration:

1) A farmer has to work hard.

I don't believe that you can be a farmer in any successful way if you are not a hard worker. If you leave a field to itself, it will be taken over by weeds. Just like that, real ministry is hard work. All Christians should work hard in their spiritual field as diligently as a farmer works in his field.

Some people expect something for nothing. But wise people know that you often get out of things according to the measure you put into them. If you are putting forth little effort in your Christian walk, you should expect little result.

Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

2) A farmer has to be patient.

James 5:7 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain

When I planted a handful of flower seeds on our lawn about twenty years ago, I expected them to grow to show me some pretty flowers fast. I gave them a week. I thought I was very generous with the timeline. Nothing happened for an entire month. Can you believe it? When it finally produced a few green leaves, I forgot that they were there and mowed the whole lawn including them. I never got to see those flowers.

No crop appears overnight. Like farmers, we need to be patient and recognize that it takes time for growth to happen in our lives. However, the word “patience” does not speak of a passive resignation, but of an expectant waiting for the Lord. This is not a casual, nonchalant approach. Rather, it is an excited expectancy, a readiness.

3) A farmer deserves his share of the harvest.

The spiritual leaders, like pastors, who share the Word with the people are the first ones to enjoy its blessings. The pastor and the teacher always get more out of the sermon or lesson than do the congregation because they put much more into it. They also get great joy out of seeing planted seeds bear fruit in the lives of others. Ministry is hard work, and it can have many disappointments. But the rewards are worth it.

F. APPLICATION

Our weakness is a blessing when we lean on God’s strength.