

A Soldier, an Athlete, and a Farmer

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It sounds like the first line of another bad joke, but have you ever considered what a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer have in common? At a basic level of observation there does not seem to be anything of value that would coalesce these three with a sense of commonality. However, a deeper observation of Scripture finds there is one thing they all have in common: they are each used by the apostle Paul to describe aspects of Christianity.

Consider 2 Timothy 2:3-6: *“Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.”*

In this passage the apostle considers attributes from each of these types of people to make application to the Christian. Each one relates something different, but each attribute is equally vital to the survival of the servant of God.

No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him (Vs. 4). Part of the soldier's responsibility is to not worry about what is happening around him, but to ensure that he does his job performing the orders of his commander. His duties are vital to his survival and that of his fellow soldiers. Therefore, he must be wholly focused on the task at hand.

The same holds true with Christianity. It is easy for Christians to get caught up in the petty things of this world. Nevertheless, the Christian must remain focused on what the Lord commands, for only by maintaining that focus on truth and godliness can a man ensure his eternal survival and aid his fellow man.

An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules (Vs. 5). The athlete who desires to win in an event can only do so by striving for his goal according to the rules. The athlete who refuses to compete according to the rules will be denied the satisfaction of winning.

In Christianity, there is only one way for us to win the race that is set before us (Heb. 12:1), that is by running it according to the rules. There are no shortcuts, the same rules apply to all and will be equally applied across the board.

It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops (Vs. 6). The farmer who works in the fields or vineyards is the first partaker of the fruit of his labor. He has worked diligently to plant and cultivate seed and to protect his crops from harm. Therefore, he is the first to enjoy the fruits of his labors.

As Christians, when we sow our spiritual fields with the word of God, live our lives according to his commands, and teach others to do the same, we reap the rewards of our labors. The Christian is not sowing to gain physical wealth and crops, but is working with the desire of reaping a spiritual harvest of eternal rest for the righteous (Heb. 4:11).

As Christians we need to live and work having learned from the examples of the soldier, athlete, and farmer. ~ Adam Cozort