

Soldier Athlete Farmer 2Tim 2:1-15

We have embarked on a course that is different from that of organized religion. For almost all denominations and some that refuse to call themselves denominations are a system of how we are to worship and live. There is a uniform interpretation of Scripture presented. A name is given to the group to separate it from other systems and to label this particular system.

This is man's way of operating. It is his nature to systematize and organize his understanding of things. This is so that he can explain it and define it and tell its uniqueness to those who might inquire. That's not all bad but too often it ends up separating the body of Christ and excluding parts, while confining the work of the HS to methods and formulas.

While in the Wesleyan Church I was often asked to explain what made Wesleyanism unique. I would then have to try to outline certain doctrines with simplicity and brevity. People would immediately make judgements as to whether or not I was a part of what they believed by holding it up to their favorite doctrine. What's wrong with this picture?

While on my trip I had time to read the rest of "The Torch of the Testimony" an outline of church history. I shared some of it with you. I want to tell you what we are doing has been going on since the church was birthed. People met in homes without a name and an organization. Because they refused to come under one of the great systems or the other they were harassed and persecuted. I'm not talking about just the Catholic Church but some of the reformed churches also, the Lutheran and Anglican Churches also persecuted these little groups of believers. In fact the first colonists were fleeing Anglican persecution – Puritans.

Some of them eventually turned into denominations, some died out in the second or third generation. Some joined other denominations, and others remained independent and unorganized yet lasted for many generations.

They believed in the priesthood of the believer to the extent that there was not clergy and laity distinction. All could speak in the service. They believed if two or three met in Jesus' name that He was present with them. They resisted being labeled or making a name for themselves. Most saw all believers regardless of label as family in Christ. Most expected their relationship with Christ to bring about a difference in them that would be visible to the world.

Have I made a box? These are generalities but around this framework of faith in Christ alone they experienced a wide range of organization, emphasis, Biblical interpretation. If there was a common core belief it could be summed up in this short verse.⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel,... 2 Tim 2:8 (NIV)

Thinking back to the beginning of the church we see the same loose format. The HS was the organization, - The apostles did meet to confer but it does not appear that they developed campaigns, or this year's emphasis, or goals for the year 45. LIFE of the HS in the believers was what directed and He did so in each place uniquely. We have looked at similarities in

style and organization but we must be careful not to do what has been done over and over and that is to make our understanding the only way and the hard and fast rule by which any work coming out of this group must follow. We need the LIFE of the HS just as they did. Where Jesus is present and the HS is leading, the HS becomes the organizer and director. Christ truly becomes the head of the Church.

But let us not be guilty of pretending. If there is no LIFE present may we honestly humbly say so and go to prayer and ask for mercy and grace. If we gather and we have all been too busy to pray and spend time in the Word hearing what God has for us let us be silent. Man is too good at presenting his great ideas, whatever comes to mind, but the best of man is not LIFE. We need to find the balance of looking forward to sharing what the Lord has shown us or spoken to us in the Word and the fear of uttering something of ourselves that may quench the Spirit. Don't touch the Ark of the Covenant. Don't put the hand print of man on the things of God. The tools of the Holy Place and the vessels, the Bread of the Presence were only to be touched by those sanctified and anointed for that service. Don't steady the ark like Uzzah.

Do you see the parallel? We dare not touch with our carnal nature, our old man what is for the New Man alone. When we do we turn it into religion. Our very involvement is polluting. Please don't misunderstand and think if you are struggling and in need you should not speak out and say so. That is not the Old Man but the New Man acknowledging the battle and asking for godly assistance in keeping the Old Man in his place – dead. I'm talking about trying to look good spiritually, digging up something to share when the Lord has not spoken to your heart and the Word has not come alive. I hope you take this not as guilt but as encouragement. The living Lord Jesus wants to be the center of this fellowship and the last thing He wants us to center around is a man or an emphasis on a side doctrine. For that to be a reality it means we all must take time to let Him speak to us in the Word, to be in prayer about our life and fellowship, our growth in Him. We are often challenged with this and often fall short but the reissue of the challenge is not so we can be condemned but so that we can grow in Christ likeness. The alternative is the warning Paul gave the Corinthians in 1Cor 11:17,18 Do you see the hand of man polluting the things of God? The only way we can have unity is to come together after a week of following hard after God. If we come with things of the Lord it will continue to blend in an ever increasing wonder as He reveals Himself to us. Unity – a oneness from a united focus on Jesus Christ and not our favorite doctrine or pet issue or personal opinion.

We meet to worship our living Savior and to grow in the knowledge of Him. We meet to encourage each other and to help each other mature. We meet to share the wonder of who He is to us each week. Out of the reality of his Life in those meetings we will see God produce fruit in our lives. That will reach out and touch the lives of others. I don't believe this is essentially a place for the lost to come to find Christ although that can certainly happen as the unsaved observe our worship. 1Co 14. But that is not why we gather. Salvation of the lost is a work of God, and sometimes He graciously uses our feet in bringing the Gospel to others. How beautiful are the feet of him who leads someone to a worship service to get saved??? is not what the Scripture says. Out of your growing in Christlikeness

people will be led to Jesus, opportunities will arise to present the Gospel. Examine the Scriptures and see if you think that the focus of our gathering should be Christian maturity.

I grew up a Baptist and they have an altar call every Sunday. If I see the HS working on an unsaved heart I won't hesitate to share the Gospel in our worship service but that shouldn't take the place of us praying for and being a friend to those the Lord is directing us to in our everyday lives. I don't think Acts 2 or 3 was a planned evangelical campaign confined to a worship time, in fact both happened just outside of the time gathered for prayer.

Lets jump back to our text – I want to make these letters to Timothy our next Bible study but let us take a brief look at what the three occupations Paul said our Christian life is comparable to.

A Soldier: endure hardship, we will face the character shaping instrument of hardship if we have enlisted in the army of God. Soldiers put up with things civilians never would because they are called to a serious task dealing with life and death, power and control. not getting involved in civilian affairs: soldiers at the time of Christ were starting to take their retirement in property so during the end of their terms they would start checking out land and thinking about making a living and became double minded. This does not please the commanding officer for lives are at stake, including our own. We must realize the seriousness of our call and be single minded. Maybe even more so since God has called this group to be a Spirit led church.

An athlete: running according to the rules – we have a law of love and can't set that aside to be religious. If we want the crown promised to all those who love Him, we have to watch that we are running within the rules. Jesus gave us just two – love the Lord your God with all your heart soul and mind and your neighbor as yourself.

A farmer: A hard working farmer expects his share. It is hard work to be a Christian. Christianity is not works but a Christian will work hard at being what he is called to be. God keeps records and a reward awaits us. We do it out of love and still we receive a reward. That reward is not just in the next life but is also a part of this one as we reap the fruits of a life in Christ.

Let us as a body have the enduring attitude of a soldier, the single mindedness of an athlete running within the rules, the drive of a farmer expecting fruit from our labors. Reflect on these things Paul wrote. Where do you need to rekindle your efforts or seek the HS assistance ?