

**CHURCH IMPROVEMENT: BUILDING A
CHURCH THAT HONORS GOD AND LOVES
PEOPLE THROUGH SMALL GROUPS
2 Timothy 2: 22**

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

Use your imagination together and talk about what it would have been like to be a U.S. citizen during WWII. How would your life have been different than it is now? How would you have related to your fellow citizens? How would you have thought about and acted towards the troops who were engaged in the battle or those about to go into battle? Imagine what it would have been like to be a soldier in an infantry platoon actually engaged in the battle. What kinds of emotions would you have experienced? What activities would you be engaged in? What would your relationships have been like with the other soldiers?

When a nation is at war for its survival, as the U.S. was in WWII, every citizen is affected by the war. Your emotions, attitudes, thoughts and actions are very different than when you are at peace. You view your fellow citizens as comrades in the "war effort." You deny yourself many things in order to contribute to the effort. If you are in the infantry, in battle, everything about your life is consumed with the battle you are engaged in. If you allow yourself to be distracted in any way, you will perish. Your fellow soldiers become essential to your making it safely through the war.

In numerous places the NT compares the Christian life to warfare (Eph 6: 10-18, Phil. 2:25, 1 Timothy 1: 18, 6:12, 2 Timothy 2: 3-4, 4:7, Philemon 2, etc.). Other metaphors are also used (athletic competition, farming, sailing, traveling through a desert, carrying a cross to your own execution, etc.) to show that the Christian life is not an easy, leisure cruise to heaven but a struggle, a "Dangerous Journey", as an abridged version of the book "Pilgrim's Progress" says it.

Paul wrote 1 & 2 Timothy to help his young apprentice to fight the fight of faith. In them he gives numerous instructions on how Timothy is to live and fight. One of those commands is found in 2 Timothy 2:22, "Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, peace and love along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." Paul knows that if Timothy is going to make it safely to heaven he will only do it in the company of others who "call on the Lord out of a pure heart." The entire Scriptures teach that the fight of faith requires each of us join the army if we expect to win the war. In this lesson we will examine three reasons the NT gives for the necessity of fighting the fight of faith with faithful comrades.

STUDY

If we are going to correctly understand the importance of fighting for faith with fellow-soldiers we need to consider the relationship between our security in Christ and the necessity of persevering in faith.

1. According to Romans 8:28-30 how many true Christians will not make it to heaven?

None. Every person whom God determined before the creation of the world to love (foreknew) and then predestined to be saved (conformed to the image of his son, i.e., glorified) will be brought safely to heaven by God's invincible power (Romans 8: 31-39). It is impossible for any true Christian, one of those whom God predestined to be conformed to the image of his son to not be conformed to the image of his son. All who are predestined are called, all who are called are justified, all who are justified are glorified, not one is lost.

2. How do each of these passages show that it is possible for a person to appear to be a Christian but eventually discover he or she is not?

- Matthew 7:15-20 *Many false teachers will appear to be Christians (sheep) but who they really are, non-Christian false teachers will be exposed in the judgment and they will be sent to hell.*
- Matthew 7: 21-23 *Many people with correct theology (They call Jesus Lord) who have performed miracles in the name of Jesus, who have shared the gospel with others, will be sent to hell by*

Jesus. In other words, many who appear to be Christians will be found out, at the judgment to have not been Christians.

- *Matthew 10: 2-4 with 26: 14-15, 24, 47-50 Judas appeared to be a true follower of Christ for three years. He even performed miracles in Jesus' name and preached the gospel (Matthew 10:5)! Yet, in the end it was clear that he was not a true Christian but a pretender and he experienced God's judgment (that is the meaning of "woe" in 26:24)*
- *Matthew 13: 5-7 with vv. 20-22 There are two classes of people (rocky soil and thorny soil) who appear to respond positively to the word of God but who are proven to not be Christians by abandoning Christ and by their fruitlessness.*
- *Matthew 24: 9-13 Persecution and suffering causes many professing Christians to abandon the faith while true Christians prove they have been born again by persevering in their faith to the end.*
- *1 Corinthians 1: 2 with 2 Cor. 13:5 Paul addresses the entire church as though they all are Christians (sanctified in Christ Jesus) and yet he envisions it as being possible that some of them, if they were to examine themselves to see if they were truly in the faith would discover that they are not true Christians. This is how Paul treats every church. He treats all professing Christians as if they are true Christians yet he continually warns all professing Christians to make sure they really are Christians.*
- *1 Timothy 1: 18-20 Here are two men that have "shipwrecked" their faith. They are professing Christians but by their conduct or beliefs have called into question the veracity of their profession. Paul "hands them over to Satan" for the purpose of restoring them to the faith (to teach them not to blaspheme). He holds these two up as a warning for Timothy to make sure he doesn't end up in the same boat as these men.*
- *Hebrews 2: 1-3 It is possible for professing Christians to drift away*
- *Hebrews 3: 12-14 It is possible for professing Christians to have their hearts hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Only those who persevere will be saved.*
- *1 John 2: 18-20 There is a group of people who at one time were part of the church to which John writes but who left the church and so proved that they never actually belonged to the church.*

The Scriptures teach that every true Christian will persevere in faith to the end of their life. However, they must persevere. There are many "helps" or "means of grace" (to use an old expression) that God has given to us to enable us to persevere to the end. The encouragement of other Christians is one of the main ones (Hebrews 3: 12-14, 10: 22-26).

3. According to Galatians 5: 16-17 and Hebrews 3: 13 what is one of the enemies threatening to destroy me?

My own sin nature. My love for the pleasures of sin threatens my making it safely to heaven.

4. According to 1 Peter 5: 8 & 1 Thessalonians 3:5, who is another of my enemies threatening to destroy my faith?

The devil is seeking my destruction.

5. According to John 8: 44, 1 Timothy 4: 1-2, & 1 John 4: 1-4 what is one of Satan's chief weapons? How does he seek to destroy us?

He seeks to mislead us through false teaching. He is a liar and so one of his primary weapons is deception. If he can get us to believe a lie while convincing us that it is the truth, he wins.

6. According to Job 1: 9-19, 1 Peter 5:8 and 1 Thess. 3: 1-5, what is another of Satan's weapons?

Persecution and all kinds of suffering. He intends that we abandon God as a result of suffering. He sends suffering to cause us to question God's love and power and so to forsake Christ.

7. According to 1 John 5: 3-5 & 19 what is another of my enemies?

The whole world.

8. According to 1 John 2: 15-16, what is it about the world that is opposed to my faith?

The world appeals to my desires to be happy without God through created pleasures which are legitimate to experience in Christ but which can be snares to lead me from Christ when I “must” have them in order to be happy or when I demand to have them because I deserve to be treated well.

9. Describe how being vitally connected to fellow soldiers in the fight of faith would help you successfully overcome these three enemies. Have you ever been helped by another Christian to overcome any of these powerful enemies? Describe how that happened.

The fight of faith requires I join the army if I expect to win the war because my foes are fierce, relentless and powerful.

10. How does Paul describe the Christian life in Romans 7: 14-25?

The reality of the Christian life is that I am very weak. I have new desires because I have been given a new heart. I want to do good, to obey God’s law. However, due to the presence of indwelling sin, I also have strong desires to do evil. I find that even when I’m doing good, there is still some measure of evil present in me, while wanting and doing good. There is a never ending tension in the Christian life. However, there is a day coming when Jesus will deliver me from this body of death and I will only want to love him and I will only do his will. That day will arrive when Jesus returns and not any sooner.

11. What are some ways you see the reality of Romans 7 in your own life?

12. According to 1 Thess. 2: 2-3 & Romans 1:12 what function do other Christians play in my life when I am in danger of being overcome?

Other Christians strengthen and encourage me in my faith. They help me to hold fast to Christ even though I am weak. They are one of God’s appointed means for preserving my faith.

13. Have you ever had another Christian strengthen and encourage you in your faith when you were feeling especially weak and vulnerable?

The fight of faith requires I join the army if I expect to win the war because I am weak and easily overcome.

14. In 1 Thessalonians 2: 10-12 what do we learn about the process of encouragement?

Paul and his associates were able to encourage the Thessalonians because they were living the life they wanted the Thessalonians to live. Their lives backed up their teaching. Paul had the same concern for these people and their well being that a father has for his own children. He worked for their good, not to put more notches on his apostolic belt. He dealt with each of them personally. His goal was that they live a life that was worthy of God. His goal was not merely to relieve psychological distress. He did what he did so that they would live to the glory of God. Every father wants his child to be happy. This means that Paul believes that their happiness will be determined by how much they live worthy of God. He is working for their joy in the faith which means that he is working to ensure that they live in a manner that corresponds to the gospel. He does not want them to sin, not because it would make him look bad but because it will make them miserable.

15. In 1 Thessalonians 3: 6-9 how does the Thessalonians’ faithfulness to Christ impact Paul and his associates?

Their example of faithfulness inspires Paul and Co. to persevere in their trials. It also causes them to rejoice in God and give praise to him for his enabling grace in the lives of the Thessalonians.

16. Describe a time you have been encouraged to preserve in your faith because you saw or heard of the faithfulness of another Christian in a difficult situation.

17. According to 1 Thess. 4: 13 and 18 why does Paul want Christians to know about what is going to happen when Christ returns?

Knowing about the return of Christ is meant to enable Christians to grieve in way that is hopeful, not hopeless like non-Christian grieving. This knowledge of Christ's return is meant for them to use to encourage one another to remain faithful to Christ in the midst of suffering.

18. What does this tell us is a necessary mark of Christian encouragement?

Encouragement must include thoughtful and sensitive application of the truth of God's word to one another's lives. Faith cannot be strengthened without promises and so encouraging one another requires that we help each other to believe the promises.

19. Have you ever been helped by another Christian reminding you of God's promises?

The fight of faith requires I join the army if I expect to win the war because God supplies His strength through the encouragement of faithful comrades.

20. What would be one thing we could do in our group that would make our experience together more of an encouragement to one another's faith?

21. What is one thing you will do this week to seek to strengthen and encourage someone else's faith?