

Perseverance -“No One is Defeated Until He Gives Up”

By Rodney L. Henry

It was at the end of the first day of the Battle of Shiloh, during our Civil War, that the Union Army had suffered serious reverses. General U.S. Grant was met by his greatly discouraged chief engineer, James McPherson who said, “Things look bad, General. We’ve lost half of our artillery and a third of the infantry troops. Our line is broken and we are pushed back to the river.”

General Grant made no reply, and McPherson impatiently asked what he intended to do. “Do? Why re-form the lines and attack the rebels at daybreak. Won’t they be surprised!!!” And surprised they were. The Confederate troops were routed the next morning. The point of this story is **“no one is defeated until he gives up.”**

At its essence, **perseverance is not giving up**. But we live in a world of quitters. We have this saying, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” That saying really does not describe the people in our culture. A more accurate description is “When the going gets tough, we look for an easy way out.” People are quitters even in the important things in life.

The workplace. – In the past couple of years, I can’t tell you how many people I know for both inside the church and outside the church who have quit their jobs. They quit their jobs because they didn’t like it and then blame God for not providing.

Marriages. – Marriage is the centerpiece of civilization. To the extent that marriages are healthy, families will be healthy. To the extent that families are healthy, the culture will be healthy. I do not need to tell you, that people are quitting marriages at an alarming rate. Every church and family has been impacted by divorce.

Families. – The most important and most difficult job in the world is being a parent. But the job of parenthood is so difficult and challenging that many are giving up on children. As parents, we are a nation of quitters, raising the next generation of quitters.

The church. - The church is God's chosen instrument on earth to further the work of his kingdom. But the church is full of people who are less than perfect. We cannot have a Seventh Day Baptist without a lot of people doing their part in terms of their time and money. But this is becoming increasingly more difficult. There are large churches where there are programs for every age group run by professionals where there are no expectations. People are quitting the small churches in droves and becoming part of mega-churches. That is the trend in America.

The Lord. – We live in a complex world. There are pressures on us from every direction. At times, we feel as if we cannot take any more. We just want to be rescued from the troubles and trials. So we go to the Lord and beg him to rescue us. We pray for rescue and we pray again. We get other people to pray for our rescue. It hurts to have troubles and trials. It feels terrible to feel terrible. When God doesn't rescue us there is a temptation to give up on God.

In the workplace, marriage, family, church, and the Lord, when the going gets tough there is a tendency to want to quit. I have spent a long time talking about quitting. This weekend the theme is not about quitting it is about perseverance. I am trying to help us understand perseverance by examining its opposite, quitting.

Perseverance is not giving up, not quitting. The Biblical context of perseverance also adds the concept of adversity. So a fuller understanding of perseverance would be not quitting or giving up when we are faced with difficult circumstances. ***Perseverance is only needed when we are going through troubles.***

The question is... **Will we go through troubles in life?** Jesus said to his disciples in John 16:33 – “*I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. **In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.***” Often, we focus on fact that in Jesus we will have peace. This is so true. Our right relationship with God through Jesus brings us deep down peace, that passes understanding. We focus on the fact that Jesus has overcome the world in his death and resurrection.

But what is the middle sentence in that verse? ***In this world you will have trouble.*** Will you have troubles in this life? Only if you are living in this world. Living in this world means that you will have trouble. ***In this world you will have trouble.*** I am not fond of this verse, but I have found it to be true from my experience and I know that it is true because it is from the Bible. **Having troubles in this life is not a surprise, it is the norm.** We should only be surprised when we have temporary breaks from troubles.

John 17 comes right after John 16. In John 16:33, Jesus told his disciples that ***In this world you will have trouble.*** In John 17, we find Jesus talking to God, the Father, about his disciples who will be left in the world after his resurrection. In John 17:15 Jesus said, ***My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.***

Jesus was saying, “Lord, don’t take the disciples out of this world in which they will have trouble. But while they are in this world experiencing troubles, do not allow the Devil to do his work on them.” **Jesus does not want the disciples to be rescued from troubles, just protected in troubles.**

The problem is now established. We have a tendency to quit when we experience problems. And ***In this world you will have***

***trouble.* -- The tension is between the inevitable troubles of living and our tendency to quit.**

The solution is summed up in the one Biblical term, ***perseverance***. Perseverance **assumes** that people go through troubles and trials of all kinds. Perseverance **requires** that we do not give up while experiencing the inevitable troubles of life.

Hebrews 12:1-11 describes this whole business of perseverance.

¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, **let us throw off everything that hinders** and the sin that so easily entangles, and **let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.** ²Let us **fix our eyes on Jesus**, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³**Consider him who endured such opposition** from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

⁴In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons:

“My son, **do not make light of the Lord’s discipline**, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,
⁶ because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”

⁷**Endure hardship as discipline**; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? ⁸If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. ⁹Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! ¹⁰Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹**No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.**

The writer of Hebrews tells us that life is like a foot race. We are told “***let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.***” This suggests that God has laid out a race course for each of us.

God knows that this race course of life will be full of obstacles, because... *In this world you will have trouble.* So in this race marked by troubles and trials we are told to run it **with perseverance**. God knows that we have a tendency to give up when we are faced with troubles and trials. So we are told that in life's race marked with troubles and trials, run with perseverance, meaning do not give up. **How do we do that?**

1. **Let us throw off everything that hinders**, vs 1. When you are in life's race or any race, you don't need extra baggage. I remember when I was in survival school in the Air Force. Everyone on flight status had to go to survival school. It was winter time in Washington state on the Canadian border. It was cold with 6 feet of snow on the ground. We spent 5 days surviving in what they called the *wilderness trek*. With snow shoes, we trekked all over the mountains and valleys of northern Washington with 40 pound packs on our backs. In the pack was extra clothes and stuff we thought we would need on the trek. After the first day of hiking with that pack, it felt like it weighed 140 pounds. All of us started taking stuff out of the pack and leaving it behind so we wouldn't be weighed down with anything we didn't need. I can remember leaving behind my tooth brush on the third day just so that I wouldn't have to keep carrying it. –

What do you need to throw off that is hindering your race through life? Do you have baggage from your past? Do you have bad self-perceptions that hinder you? What is the junk in your life that you need to get rid of to run the race without quitting?

2. According to our text, we need to **throw off sin that so easily entangles us**. In the same wilderness trek we had to hike with snow shoes because there was 6 feet of snow on

the ground. The problem with snow shoes in 6 feet of snow was the presence of trees that were 5' 11". The tops of those little trees would get entangled in the webbing of the snow shoes and down I would go, pack and all. Sin by nature will entangle us in life's race and throw us down. There is no choice, if we are going to finish the race, we must throw off sin. The race course of life has enough troubles of its own. It is stupid to add sin to the inevitable troubles of life.

3. ***Fix your eyes on Jesus.*** We are told that Jesus was one who ran this race. He had troubles and trials. He endured shame and the cross. Yet he ran this race of life perfectly and became the ***author*** of how to run the race and the ***finisher*** who gives us the faith to finish the race. Jesus had perseverance because he was the perfect ***finisher***.

4. ***Do not make light of the Lord's discipline ... and Endure hardship as discipline.*** The discipline that it is speaking of here is the work of the Lord that makes us better people. The discipline here is less about punishment and more about molding us into the people God wants us to be. First, we have to get our minds right about the discipline of the Lord. We are told to "***endure hardship as discipline.***" It is ***not the hardship itself that molds*** us into the person God wants us to be. It is ***enduring hardship*** that molds us into the person God wants us to be. Enduring hardship is the very meaning of perseverance. In fact, the Rheims translation says in this text, "***persevere under discipline.***" We will only benefit from hardships and troubles if we endure hardship so that it will make us what God wants us to be.

5. What are the results of persevering or enduring hardships??? - ***¹¹No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a***

harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Hardships, troubles, trials, and discipline are not pleasant at the time, but painful. Well duh!!! If they are painful then why would we endure them? Why not just figure out quit and get rid of the pain? -- Because it is in the perseverance that there is molding of our character. It is in the perseverance that there is reward. It is not in the trouble itself that produces molding. It is only in the perseverance and endurance in the midst of troubles and trials that rewards are produced. The text says in vs 10, ***perseverance produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who are trained by perseverance. God disciplines us for our good.***

The message of perseverance is clear. ***“No one is defeated until they give up.”*** When we give up in the midst of life’s obstacle course of troubles, we are really saying that we want God to stop working ***on us*** and ***with us***. With God working on us, it may be hard, we may get weary, but we cannot lose. Defeat can only come when we give up. ***No one is defeated until they give up.***

The Duke of Wellington returned to England after defeating Napoleon at Waterloo. He and his men were being praised for their courage and perseverance in defeating Napoleon and his army. The Duke said, “The army of Napoleon were men of courage.” “In my opinion, he said, “my men had 5 minutes more courage and perseverance than Napoleon’s men. And that is what brought us victory.” - Just five more minutes of not quitting made the difference.

Perseverance has some bad news and some good news. The bad news is that, ***In this world you will have trouble.*** I know that life is an obstacle course filled with land mines. I know that there are times when we step on one of the mines and our life

seems to blow up. I know how that feels. I know how we want to give up and quit to try to make the pain go away.

The good news is that Jesus knows what we are going through. He ran this same obstacle course of life. His heart was broken by sin and faithlessness in those he loved. He knew pain in the body and pain in his heart. Jesus was the perfect finisher of the race and he is the author of the book on how to run the race.

This same Jesus wants **us** to persevere in the inevitable troubles of life.

1. Throw off those things that hinder us from finishing the race. Get rid of thinking that causes you to want to quit.
2. Throw off sin in your life. Life has enough problems without adding the problem of your own sin.
3. Keep your eyes on Jesus and learn from the one who finished the race and wrote the book on running the race.
4. In this world you will have trouble but endure that trouble so that perseverance will mold you into the person God wants you to be.
5. Know that ***perseverance produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who are trained by it.***

Sometimes we need just five more minutes or perhaps one more day of perseverance to achieve victory. We must not give up. We must pray for just one more day of courage and strength to endure life's troubles and trials. We must not give up because **"no one is defeated until he gives up."**