

**THE SERMONS, LECTURES, AND SONGS OF
SIDNEY EDWARD COX**

II Timothy 2:6

“The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits”

Editorial Note: What follows is a sermon that was part of a series that Sidney Cox delivered on the book of II Timothy.

In 1962, Sidney and Violet Cox retired to the Salvation Army retirement home in Detroit, Michigan known as, “The Eventide.” Violet was in failing health and ultimately died in 1967. Sidney continued residency there until a late in life move to Birmingham in 1972.

Certain clues contained throughout this series reveal that it was delivered in 1968, in the aftermath of the death of Sidney’s beloved wife, Violet. It was delivered to the Grace Bible Church of Detroit.

During this period of his life, Sidney was in great demand as a preacher and Bible teacher both within The Salvation Army and churches of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (“CMA”). He had a close relationship with The Salvation Army early in life and developed a close relationship with The Christian and Missionary Alliance late in life. CMA was a wide network of churches throughout the world that shared a common theology and emphasis and was similar in that regard to The Salvation Army. Grace Bible Church was a CMA church

John Douglas Cox, grandson of Sidney Cox. December 29, 2008.

You’ll turn please to II Timothy the second chapter and the sixth verse. I think all of us have felt as we have been studying together this lovely letter, this significant letter; significant because of the fact that it is the final letter that Paul wrote; significant because it says so much to us personally. I think we’ve all been aware of the fact that he has been trying to say to us, or perhaps I should say that God was trying to say something to us, through the Apostle Paul in this letter, that we need to learn. We need to hear. And the central thought of it is: the Christian life is serious business. We do not play at being a Christian. If we do, we do so at our peril. Now that’s the message that comes thundering to us all the way through this letter: the Christian life is serious business. And it is so serious that seven illustrations are given in this second chapter to emphasize the thought that is before us. The Christian life is like this, and like that, and like something else.

And each one of these verbal miniatures bring a picture before us with which we are reasonably familiar. Not one of them is a fantastic, way out something that we do not understand. Every last one of these illustrations are down where we live. They speak our language. They talk to our hearts.

Now, dear, the Christian life begins with sonship. Now that’s the first word of the second chapter. Sonship is the beginning of the Christian life. And as we have noticed so many times,

that when we mention a thing like that, it automatically breaks itself into three sections. The Christian life has three aspects of it - three particular points that we must remember.

First of all, it has a beginning. It is not something into which we drift. The Christian life begins. Sonship is a gift of life, whether it is the sonship of the eternal or the temporal. It is a gift of life. It begins that way. Then, the second point of it is that this life thus received must be lived. We do not just receive a life, we live a life. We receive the Christian life as the gift of God, when Christ who is our life shall appear. We receive it as God's gift. And then this life is to be lived out in the receptacle of your life, where God in grace has placed it. It is to be lived out. That's the second thing that is about it. And third, it is to be communicated to others. It is to be received. It is to be lived. It is to be communicated. The three aspects of the Christian life.

Now, if it does not communicate itself to others, something is wrong somewhere. There ought to be a loud, loud voice to every Christian life. It ought to be saying something to us; it has a message. And the message ought to be clear and plain. By the way, did you notice that just at that moment I quoted a line from a song? - a song that we sing quite frequently. Where do you find the line of a song that says this? "Make the message clear and plain."¹ Now, I don't want you to answer it, because you all know the answer. But there it is, we sing it over and over again - the message of the Christian life, or should we say the message of your Christian life and mine? "Make the message clear and plain." And only as the Christian life is received as it should be, and lived as it should be, will its message ever be clear and plain.

Now, an old man from a Roman prison cell is saying this to a young man. He's saying, "Remember this - that the life that you received by the grace of God must be lived as grace ought to be lived, and the message of it should be clear and plain."

By the way, does that say anything to us? I'm not going to presume to remind you of what it says, or what it ought to say. I'm too busy listening to what it has to say to me. It has something to say to all of us - the message of our lives, clear and plain and beautiful and receivable. That's what the old man is saying here. "You may do a lot of other things, Timothy, but you will never do a greater task than the job that I'm mentioning to you now. Having received sonship from God, you live it out as it ought to be lived and communicate it as it ought to be communicated."

The Christian life, my dear, is serious business. For there isn't anything about that, but it is very serious indeed - that moment when life is received; that moment when we decide that life shall be lived as it ought to be; that moment when life is communicated from one to another.

Now, in this chapter we find these illustrations - the Christian life is like this, and like that, and like the other. Having received life and entered into sonship, we are now qualified to become soldiers; that's what the message says.² We are not qualified for soldiership, until we have first received sonship. That's where it begins. God does not enlist aliens in His army. We may do it, but he doesn't. God doesn't bring anybody into soldiership, other than those who have first become sons. And we look at soldiership, and we remember that a soldier is one who welcomes

¹ From the well-known Christian hymn, *Christ Receiveth Sinful Men*.

² II Timothy 2:3-4.

hardness, who avoids entanglements and his one business is to please him who called him to be a soldier. Notice the three again.

Now you move from that, as we did last week to this picture of the athlete.³ This is another realm altogether. Now, we find that an athlete has responsibilities too, in this way. First of all, he has responsibility for his personal fitness in the matter of his athletic equipment. Second, he has his responsibility for his personal, individual running of the race. And third, he has equal responsibility for his teamwork with others of like precious faith. We are not individual runners jogging along the pathway of life. We are involved in a teamwork, and that's in God's good grace that it should be so. We belong to a team, and we are not at liberty to neglect our personal fitness as personal Christians. And we are not at liberty to run our race as we think it ought to be run. And we are not at liberty to avoid or evade our responsibility as members of the team.

Now that's what the old man is saying to the young man. I wonder did he listen? I wonder, are you listening? Not to me, God forbid. Are you listening to Him? Are you listening what He had to say to this young man? "Timothy, you just watch that now. Don't you let anything come into that life of yours that would diminish its effectiveness - lay aside every weight. Put them on one side. Run with patience the race that is set before you personally. And get into the team now, and don't try to evade any one of them, because if you do, the message of your life will not be clear and plain, it will be a foggy unaccessible thing as it is in the case of most folks." And so we're talking about things like this.

And then the picture moves, and we get another familiar thing before us in Verse 6 this morning, and this is where we are for a few moments in Verse 6. And we've got one of the loveliest verses that was ever written, and others that attach themselves to it - the most beautiful thing. Here is the shortest of all these little verbal pictures that we have - these miniatures that the Holy Spirit gives to us, not just the Apostle Paul, the Holy Spirit gives to us. This is the shortest, the smallest of them all; 11 words in it, that's all. 11 words - the great artist has painted a picture unforgettable with 11 strokes of his brush. But I dare you to forget it. I dare you to fail to look at it.

"The husbandman that laboreth must first be partakers of the fruit."

11 words. By the way, did you notice unusual words there? Have you stopped long enough in these last few seconds to think about that word, husbandman? Let me remind you, my dear, that husbandman is the only word of this kind that is ever applied to God the Father. You never talk about God the Father as being a soldier, or as an athlete, or as a carpenter, or anything else. But you know who talked about Him as being the husbandman, don't you? Somebody said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman."⁴ And we have a word before us this morning, my dear. In the presence of it, we ought to remove our shoes. The husbandman. Now, you will find it 17 times in the New Testament. And if you're interested, you will find it 6 times in Matthew, 4 times in Mark, 4 times in Luke, once in John, once in II Timothy, and once in James 5 and 7. And if you count that, you will probably find it is 17 times. The husbandman.

³ II Timothy 2:5.

⁴ John 15:1.

Now, remember my dear, that when you see this word, the picture it brings before you is not always the same. It is related, but not exactly the same. For instance, on two occasions you will find the word has to do with the one who owns and dresses the vineyards, and the fruit is grace. But, in all the other cases, it is the picture of one who is tilling the soil. And the picture that is before us is a field, and the fruit that is before us is grain. Grapes and grains. A vineyard. A field. And in the field, the husbandman laboreth.

Do you know the meaning of that word? Oh sure, we know the meaning of it. We have labored so many times, haven't we? Yes. As a matter of fact, my dear, we don't know anything about the meaning of that word. It means one who works until weariness has wrapped itself around him to the utmost degree. I read of somebody who was walking through the upper parts of Judea and on into Samaria, and being wearied, he sat by a well. Do you remember? Weary. Somebody is laboring to bring something out of that field with such intensity that weariness has gripped him to the nth degree. Now we don't know anything about that. We know about the partial little inconveniences of tiredness that come to us once in awhile. But we don't know anything about that.

Now, we've got these words before us. Here's a farmer. And in this field, and by the way, in our little miniature that we're looking at this morning, again you find three things. You find a farmer, and a field, and fruit. And they're all there right before your eyes. I haven't invented any one of them. There's the farmer, and the field, and the fruit. Now if you want to know what the verse means, how would it be to just take a look at each one of those? We've already looked at the farmer, haven't we? - this farmer that laboreth, so that weariness abides with him. Not just occasionally. This one who is laboring to produce something in the field. And he works like this: a field that has been purchased and plowed and planted. Can you hear somebody talking to you? Because somebody way off there in the dim distance of 2000 years back is saying to a young man, "That's what your life is like. It's a field that has been purchased. It's a field that must be plowed. It's a field that must be planted. And God himself expects adequate fruit from it." Now that's what the old man is saying, and here we are before us.

Now remember, my dear, that fruit bearing is the ultimate evidence that care and labor have been put into the fields. Remember if you please, that the fruit that is to come out of the life that the Apostle Paul was talking about and to whom he was writing. And incidentally, the lives to whom he is saying this thing in Grace Bible Church this morning - That there's fruit that must be coming out of our lives, and it must be more than just ordinary, common, everyday fruit. It must be more than that. It must be fruit that will be satisfactory to the one who produces it. He must first be partaker of the fruit. And remember, my dear, that when he's talking about partaking of fruit, he's not talking about holding some luscious thing in his hands and taking a bite of it. He's talking about something else that's deeper far than that, when he says he becomes partaker of the fruit.

That fruit, my dear, must be satisfactory in three different directions. One, to the one who labored in the field and produced it. There must come to him the sense of a job, not only done, but ought to be done. When he looks at the fruit of his field, he experiences the inner satisfaction that can only come when we have done our dead-level best. Now, that's the first tasting of the

fruit. When the fruit is approved by the deepest inwardness of our own lives, and we know we have done what God wanted us to do to the best of our ability. This is the fruit. Now that's first.

Then the second thing in which he tastes of the fruit is this; that the fruit of our lives must be such; that we can spread it out on the table that is nearest to us, and the table that is not very far away from anyone of us. It must be first seen in our own lives, it must be satisfactory in our own homes, it must be satisfactory on the table of our friends and relatives with whom we live, and it is seen in all directions. And partaking of the fruit involved all three of these. The satisfaction of knowing it was done with the best of our heart; I have given my best. I am now proud to spread out the fruit of my life in my own family circle, and in the circle of the friends that are all the way around me. Now that's the second thing, where he partakes of the fruit.

And third, he must be prepared to offer that to the great husbandman, the fruits of his labor. Now, we're on sacred ground there, for remember if you please, that every field that produced the harvest, the very first fruits of it were always offered in a thanksgiving offering to God. And the first thing that comes out of our lives is not merely that which brings satisfaction to us. It's not merely something that we can spread out with satisfaction before those who are nearest to us and those who are close to us. It is something that we can offer with satisfaction and can be received with satisfaction by the great husbandman himself when we offer the first fruits of our field. Did you hear it? Did you hear it? It reminds us of something that we almost, we remind ourselves of it occasionally and always with fear and trembling, but God won't accept your second best. If we should dare to offer to him anything but the best in the first fruit's offering, do you think it will be acceptable? Oh no, no, no. Never. Never. Never.

I sometimes wonder if that isn't the reason perhaps why there are so many unsatisfied, dissatisfied, self-satisfied Christians around is because this final thing of offering to God the first fruits of our lives has been done in some way that is not satisfactory to Him. We've got scores and maybe hundreds of Sunday School teachers in the Detroit area at this very moment; one hour ago they were teaching Sunday School classes. I wonder, do you think they could all say, "I did my best." Do you think they could all say, "This was my utmost for the highest." Do you think so? I wonder sometimes. There will be lots of folks in Detroit at this very hour and we're among them, who have given an offering to God, 15 minutes ago. Is it satisfactory to God? The first fruits of our field? God help us to have courage and honesty enough to face up to the implications of something like this. This is what God is expecting. This is what God expects. Our Christian lives will never taste good to others until they taste right, good to ourselves. Did you hear it? We first laboreth, before we ever give it away to somebody else.

I read in the bulletin of the Colonial Hills Baptist Church⁵ that reached me yesterday morning. I get a lot of church bulletins sent to me. And in it was this statement – just a little fill-in. It said, "136,000 people died yesterday. 100,000 of that number had never heard of Jesus Christ." I wonder why. I wonder, could there be anybody among that 100,000 who have never heard, who failed to hear, the loud sound, or the soft sound that comes from your Christian life? That should have been heard, but wasn't? I wonder. I wonder.

⁵ In the mid-1940s, Sidney Cox served briefly as the pastor of the Colonial Hills Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia.

And so we've got a picture here before us of a farmer, and a field, and fruit. And out of the long ago, a man wrote about this to a young man, who may have looked strangely like us if he had worn the same kind of clothes. He wouldn't have been very much different to the rest of us. If Timothy had been dressed in the garments of today and had walked into this church, we would have received him there as just one of our own without any hesitation at all. He's talking to folks just like us. And in order that we might take notice of it, this verbal picture is followed by two tremendous words. You'll find them immediately following. One is "consider,," and the other is "remember."

"The husbandman who laboreth must first be partaker of the fruits."

Shall we pray?

Our Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus we come at this moment and pray that somehow or other the Word of God may have reached us just where we need it most. We pray our Father, that its cleansing power may be felt in each one of our lives, its quickening power. Help us we pray to remember that the great husbandman is expecting something from the field that is our life, and that He will not be satisfied, and we won't be satisfied either until we present to Him the best that we have. Hear our prayer, we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.