

The Responsibility of the Christian

by T. Austin-Sparks

A Christian is called to be a responsible trustee for God, waging a spiritual warfare with undivided interests and a disentangled spirit.

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Christian Responsibility"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound responsibility of Christians, urging them to recognize their role as trustees of the Gospel, warriors in spiritual warfare, disciplined athletes, and diligent craftsmen of God's Word. He highlights that being a Christian is not merely about personal pleasure but involves serious commitment and accountability to God. Sparks encourages believers to guard the precious truths entrusted to them, engage actively in the spiritual battle, and maintain integrity in handling Scripture. Ultimately, he calls for a collective effort in the Christian journey, reminding that each believer's actions impact the larger body of Christ.

Transcript

Our final word will be very simple, but I trust vital. I ask you to look again at the Letters to Timothy, with special reference to four very brief series, or groups, of fragments.

Here is the first series:

1 Tim. 1:11: "...the gospel... which was committed to my trust."

1 Tim. 1:18: "This charge I commit unto thee, my child Timothy..."

1 Tim. 6:20: "O Timothy, guard that which is committed unto thee..."

2 Tim. 1:12: "...I know Him Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I have committed unto Him against that day." (You will see that the margin gives the alternative: "He is able to guard that which He hath committed unto me".)

Now the second series:

1 Tim. 1:18: "This charge I commit unto thee... that... thou mayest war the good warfare."

2 Tim. 2:3-4: "Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier on service entangleth himself in the affairs of this life; that he may please Him Who enrolled him as a soldier."

The third series:

2 Tim. 2:5: "And if also a man contend in the games, he is not crowned, except he have contended lawfully."

The fourth series:

2 Tim. 2:15: "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth."

I wonder what impression those passages make upon you. Hearing them, reading them, putting them together, what is the conclusion to which you come? What do they say to you? Surely they ought to leave one very definite impression upon us: namely, that THE CHRISTIAN IS A VERY RESPONSIBLE PERSON. Every one of those passages, and indeed, the much more lying behind them and in these letters, does really say very, very clearly and very strongly: We are in a position of tremendous responsibility. The Christian is, in the Word of God, looked upon as being a very responsible person.

When the Lord Jesus and His apostles appealed to people to come along and follow, to be saved, to become Christians, it was never just for their own pleasure, just that they might have a good time. The appeal was never to the pleasure-instinct in people, to the desire for a good time. They never, never made their appeal on that ground at all - that if you are saved, if you become a Christian, you are going to embark upon an endless joy-ride, a whole life of pleasure and gratification. Whatever there may be of good and enjoyment and profit to follow, the appeal of Christ, the appeal of His apostles, the appeal of the Scriptures, is always to people who mean business more than pleasure, who really are prepared to take serious responsibility for the interests of their Lord, and, if needs be, to allow themselves to be involved in trouble or suffering for His sake. They are the people He wants.

The Christian As Trustee

Here, then, we have this many-sided picture of the Christian as in responsibility. Let us take up some of the titles or metaphors used, which give the Divine conception of the Christian, very simply. In the first series, 1 Tim. 1:11: "According to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust"; 1:18: "This charge I commit unto thee, my child Timothy...": 6:20: "O Timothy, guard that which is committed unto thee..." What is this conception of the Christian? The Christian is called to be, has the privilege of being, a trustee for God, a custodian of an infinitely precious deposit, committed to his trust. 'Timothy, you are in trust; Timothy, you are a trustee; Timothy, here is something precious put into your custodianship, given you of God to watch over, to guard for Him.' Paul calls it 'the gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to his trust', and he is passing it on. He has kept it intact, he has guarded it, he has preserved it: it has lost nothing; but he is about to go. 'Timothy, I pass it on to you, I hand it on to you in the Lord's Name. Timothy, guard it. It is for you to see that this Gospel, this wonderful Gospel, suffers no loss by any kind of carelessness, unwatchfulness, indifference, slothfulness, preoccupation or diversion, persecution or suffering, or anything else. Let there come to it nothing to spoil it, no tarnish, no rust, no injury. Timothy, guard it - do not let it suffer loss.' That is the Divine conception of the Christian.

What I want to urge upon you is just this. If you would claim to be a Christian, to belong to the Lord, I would that you would recognize this: that you are put in trust with the Gospel, that you are a trustee of "the gospel of the blessed God", that there rests upon you this solemn obligation to see that it does not suffer in any way through you, because of you, that on no account does it suffer, but that it is preserved in its

pristine glory and in its entirety; and that you at the end do what Paul was able to do - pass it on intact, so that there will be those who come after you who will, in their turn, take it up from you and carry it on. Does that sound very simple, very elementary? Paul put his heart into this. 'O Timothy, my child Timothy - this charge, this CHARGE I commit to thee. Guard the deposit, take care of the great trust.' Will you believe, whether you are the youngest Christian or the oldest, or somewhere between, that you are a custodian of the interests of your Lord, and that those great interests can suffer because of you, if you do not take your responsibility seriously?

But that is a very elevating thing - it is a very strengthening thing to realize that, is it not? To feel that God has committed to me His interests, that I stand in this world, not just to be a Christian and try to live a Christian life, but as a responsible trustee of the very interests of God! Whether we like it or not, it is so. If you are a Christian, this great trust, this great Gospel, is suffering or being preserved by you; it is being let down or it is being upheld, whether you like it or not. But why not do what Paul was seeking to get Timothy to do? Realize this, face this, and take it up, as a solemn responsibility before God: 'I am a man with a charge, put in trust, a trustee.'

The Christian As Warrior

The next series of fragments begins with the 18th verse of chapter one of the first letter: "War the good warfare..."; followed by these so familiar words in the second letter, second chapter: "...a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier on service entangleth himself in the affairs of this life; that he may please Him Who enrolled him as a soldier."

(a) On Active Service

There are three ideas bound up with those words. Firstly, of course, the conception of the Christian as a warrior, and of the Christian life and Christian service as a warfare. Perhaps we hardly need to be reminded of that. It may be that you are a really war-scarred warrior: you have been in the fight and the battle has left its marks on you. You know it quite well. And yet it needs to be said - perhaps firstly to those who have newly donned the armour, who have newly come to the Lord. Understand that you have been enrolled in a spiritual army! That is what it says: you have been enrolled in a spiritual army, and your life-business is WAR. You are going to find that out sooner or later, whether you like it or not; but there is the fact. And that is a very responsible position. One, by failure in this warfare, may let down many and affect the whole campaign.

But, although the older ones may know it so well, and feel that you do not need to be reminded, are you sure that you do not? I think I know something about the warfare from experience; and yet, and yet - there is this subtle fact, that very often, when we are in a situation, and things are going on, we begin to blame people and circumstances, and get all worked up, and look for scapegoats, forgetting the reality of this thing - Why, the Devil is after something! Here the battle is on, there is no doubt about it; the air is thick with conflict; and we get our eyes on people and things. We are defeated, we are just beaten, rendered casualties, put out of the fight - simply because we lose sight of the fact, the abiding fact, that we are in a spiritual warfare, and that behind 'things' there are other, spiritual, forces.

We all need to be reminded. It is no small thing, you know, when we are really in a situation like that, and things are getting worked up to a fine pitch and stress, when someone comes along and says, 'Look here, the enemy is in this; he is trying to get you, he knows something or other, he is on your track; let us have some prayer about it'; and we get to prayer, and the whole thing goes. Sometimes just to remind one

another of the fact is a tremendous deliverance: we find that it IS a fact. We have been attributing the situation to things and people, and there is all the time something much deeper than that behind it. We need to be reminded continually that we are in a warfare - for we are.

That is the first thing here - this conception of the Christian life - and we must get hold of it and settle it. And, although I don't like saying it, I don't think we are ever going to be out of this warfare here!

(b) With Undivided Interests

The second thing that is in these statements is that, if we are going to wage triumphant spiritual warfare, we must be ALTOGETHER in it. "No soldier on active service" (for that is the literal wording) "entangleth himself with the affairs of this life." He must be DISENTANGLED. One of the enemy's most successful tactics is to get us all tied up, tangled up with all kinds of conflicting things, or with some other interests, dividing us in our life and in our strength and in our application. Now this that Paul says to Timothy here does not mean, 'Look here, you must not go into business - you must come out of business, and be all on spiritual work.' It does not mean that you have got to leave everything else and come and be a full-time worker, or full-time soldier - it does not mean that at all. It is entirely possible - and, though difficult, this is what the Apostle and what the Lord would say to most of us - it is altogether possible for you to pursue your daily employment, and do it conscientiously and thoroughly, as you should, leaving nothing for reproach, while yet at the same time, whether in it, through it, or over it, your supreme interests are spiritual. The really governing things in your life are the Lord's things.

The warfare, then, may be in the daily business. But if you get all churned up and obsessed, you are put out of the war, out of the fight. Inwardly in our hearts there has got to be a disentangled spirit. Now that could be enlarged upon very much. The Apostle is saying: You must not have two dominating interests in life; you can only have one. You must not be a divided person who has, on the one side, interests in the things of the Lord, on the other side, interests in the world. That is no good; you will not be a good soldier if you are like that. If you have to be in this world, and do its work, and follow your profession, your dominating concern must be the interests of the Lord, and in that part of your life you must be disentangled. In a word, one thing over all must predominate; there must be no dividedness of heart or mind. "This one thing I do...", said the Apostle.

(c) Alongside Of Others

And the third factor or feature in these fragments is something which is not observable in our translation. You notice it says: "Suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus..." There are other translations of that clause, such as: "Take your share in suffering hardship..." Neither of them, perhaps, gives the exact sense of the original. This is one of the occasions when Paul uses one of his favourite compounds. You know that Paul was tremendously fond of compound words, and one of his favourite kinds of compound was a whole series of words with the prefix 'syn' to them. 'Syn' means 'together', and what he is saying here is this: 'Look here, Timothy, we are all in it. You are not alone in this; this is a collective matter, this is a corporate matter. This is something which, if it only related to you, might not be very important; you might not think it important enough to be seriously considered. But look here, Timothy, we are together - you must not let me down.'

This fact of the collective or corporate aspect of the conflict is a big thing, is it not? We are fighting alongside of one another and for one another; the battle is a common battle, and we must not let one another down. If someone else is having a bit of hardship, we must come and share the hardship with

them; and if we are having a bit of hardship, they must come and share it with us. It is a tremendous factor in victory, to keep together in it. So it is the 'togetherness' of the battle and the warfare that is quite definitely thought of by the Apostle here.

The Christian As Athlete

Our next 'group' consists of just this fragment: "If a man contend in the games, he is not crowned except he have contended lawfully." Here, hidden behind the English translation, is a Greek word - athleo - from which we get our English words 'athlete' and 'athletic'. The Greek word means to compete in, or take part in, the public games or contests. The Christian is compared to a Greek athlete. Now that sounds like sport, but it is not! For the word is a very strong word, implying one who engages in a contest for the mastery. That is making a business of things, is it not? We, as Christians, are called to engage seriously in a contest, at the end of which there is a prize, which it is possible for us to lose. That is the conception. Of course, there is a very large background of the Greek games to this word of Paul's; he knew all about it. The Greek athlete was called upon to spend ten whole months in rigorous preparatory discipline and training before he was allowed to enter the contests. And the rules for training were stringent. He must shun many things; he must observe certain regulations; he must discipline himself and put aside all his own preferences and his own likes. He must recognize that this thing is so serious that, should he break one of the regulations of his training, he is disqualified, he is not allowed to enter.

Well, here is a contest, here is an engagement, which calls upon us to be very watchful, and to be in many directions self-denying. But don't mix this up with your salvation - you can never be saved by good works! To be a Christian you don't have to give up this and give up that, and do all sorts of things that you don't naturally like doing! This is not IN ORDER TO BE a Christian; but when you ARE a Christian, here is a vocation, here is a responsibility. Paul said: "I buffet my body... lest... after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected" (1 Cor. 9:27), and he is thinking of this very thing - this business on hand, this great responsibility into which he is called, this great contest. 'I must see to it that my body, my fleshly appetites, don't get the upper hand; I must keep a strong hand upon myself; I must learn the disciplined life.' To most people that word 'discipline' is a most hated word. Yes, but this is not just discipline for its own sake - it is because of what is involved. And we can lose so much - young Christians, you can lose so much, and you can be disqualified from the great calling with which you are called, and from obtaining the great prize, the real prize, which is set before you, if you do not learn the disciplined life. Keep under your body. A Christian ought to be a very disciplined person, with a life well ordered and regulated - nothing loose or flippant or careless. We ought to be people girded on a great business.

The Christian As Craftsman

And finally, the second chapter of the second letter, and the so well-known 15th verse: "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth." The translation that we have in our Authorized Version, "STUDY to show thyself approved unto God... rightly dividing the word...", has given rise to a good deal of misunderstanding. Many have thought that this is a picture of the student in his study, taking the Word of God and cutting it up and putting it into all kinds of different watertight compartments and dispensational sections. A whole school of dispensationalism and ultra-dispensationalism has been built upon this word, and it is all wrong. We shall be led astray if we get that idea.

This has nothing to do with the study and with the book. The Revised Version has improved upon the translation: "Give diligence to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed..." It is true that your work is with the Word of God, but the picture here is not of a student, but of a craftsman, and what lies behind the Greek here is the stonemason. The stonemason has the specification before him of the stones that are to be cut and fitted into a building; and in the specification, or the blueprint, there are all the lines where the cuts are to be made, very finely, so that, when these stones are put together, they exactly fit, they belong to one another. It is the craftsman's job. With all the mass-production and the machine-made things of today, I think there are few things better than to see a real craftsman at work: really to find a craftsman, an old-fashioned craftsman, with his genuine hand-work, that is not the work of a machine.

Paul is talking about the craftsman. And he says, 'Now you have got the specification given to you in the Word of God. Don't toy with it, don't play with it, don't be careless about it. See to it that the truths of the Word of God are faithfully observed, that you handle the Word of God absolutely honestly.' In his second Corinthian letter you remember the Apostle used this phrase: "Not... handling the word of God deceitfully" (2 Cor. 4:2). What does that mean? Making it mean what it does not mean, for our own convenience - because it suits us so to interpret it! But "no... scripture is of private interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20). Our attitude must be: The Word of God says THIS; we cannot get round it. Don't try to get round it, don't try to make it mean something that it does not mean, and certainly don't be superior to it and think that you know better than what it says. Be absolutely honest with the Word of God. The Word of God says that; the blueprint, the pattern, the specification gives that as the precise line of things: then take it. Don't think that you can improve upon it; don't be careless about it. Take note of it.

The Spirit, the Holy Spirit, gave the Word. Here, to Timothy, the Apostle says so: "All Scripture given by inspiration of God is profitable for..." this and that and that. The Spirit gave the Word. We must be adjusted by the Holy Spirit to the Word that He has given! That is 'rightly dividing', or, as literally the word is, 'cutting straight lines' with, the Word of God. Just be honest with it! Just let it mean to you what it really does mean, and don't try to get round it. "All Scripture is given by inspiration", by the Holy Spirit. Paul was not saying things just out of his own predilection, his own preferences, his likes and dislikes: he was speaking what has become Scripture. Don't get round it. Be honest. You don't stand to lose anything; you stand to gain the blessing of God. Yes, we must be adjusted to the Word of God: neither less than the Word, nor more.

We have been considering some figures, metaphors, similes, of the Christian. They are very clear, very simple; but I come back again to where I commenced. Put together, they do show that a Christian is a very responsible person, or is to be so regarded; one who must say to himself or herself, 'I am not in something that is just optional - my pleasure, my life; not something that does not matter very much - as though I could say, "I am saved, I shall get to Heaven all right!"' Oh, no! There is more than getting to Heaven, there is more than just being saved. There are great interests of the Lord to be served, and these are the people required for them.

So - 'Give diligence, take your share of the hardship as a good soldier, guard your trust, keep the rules, learn discipline.' "For thus shall be richly supplied unto you the entrance into the eternal kingdom..." (2 Peter 1:11). And so we, the successors of Paul in the battle and in the work, may be able to say, as he said: "I have fought the good fight... I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day: and not only to me, but also to all them that have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7-8). We are in the same fight, the same contest,

the same calling.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/the-responsibility-of-the-christian/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net