

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

# THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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## Portraits of Discipleship

Scripture uses a number of figures and metaphors to paint portraits for us that illustrate what being a disciple of Christ is about. Consider three examples of these portraits of discipleship.

**Soldiers of Christ** – In **2 Timothy 2:3**, the inspired apostle Paul used the term “*good soldier of Jesus Christ*” to describe the faithful Christian. This imagery is the basis for a number of well-known hymns, including *Soldiers of Christ, Arise; Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus; Onward, Christian Soldiers*; and *Sound the Battle Cry*.

The Christian’s “fight” is in a *spiritual* battlefield (**Eph. 6:12**). The *enemy* Christ’s soldiers fight is Satan (**Eph. 6:11**). As our adversary, Satan attacks us by launching “*fiery darts*” (**Eph. 6:16**) (i.e., temptations to sin). Our adversary is vicious (**1 Pet. 5:8**), but also cunning (**2 Cor. 11:14**). The seriousness of our enemy and his tactics necessitates training, preparation, and watchfulness on the part of Christ’s soldiers.

While the enemy is vicious, our Almighty Commander assures victory for those who stand steadfastly with Him (**Eph. 6:13**). To “*stand against the wiles of the devil*,” we must put on all of the “*armor*” God supplies (**Eph. 6:11**), and thus “*be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might*” (**Eph. 6:10**).

The “*armor of God*” includes several references to the Word of truth, which we must be prepared to use, defend, and share (**Eph. 6:14-17**). The armor also includes the “*shield of faith*,” which involves unwaveringly trusting our Commander (**Eph. 6:16**). If we

trust and obey the orders Christ has given us, follow His lead, and petition Him for assistance, we need not fear defeat.

Obedying our Lord is especially important when the spiritual battle is tough. A “*good soldier of Jesus Christ*” endures hardships with perseverance and constancy in well-doing (**2 Tim. 2:3**).

Moreover, a good soldier of Christ has firm *loyalty* to Him. This leads to avoidance of distractions that would hinder us from dedicating the time and attention needed to fulfill the duties He gives us (**2 Tim. 2:4**).

**Members of a Body** – A second portrait of discipleship is seen in **1 Corinthians 12:27**. There, the inspired apostle Paul told the church at Corinth, “*Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.*”

Just as the physical body has a head that makes decisions for the rest of the body, the same is true with the body of Christ. As our Head, Christ has full authority to direct us (**Eph. 1:20-23**). We must *submit* (**Eph. 5:24**).

While members of Christ’s body (Christians) have a variety of backgrounds and talents, all faithful members enjoy equal *access* to God and equal *importance* to Him.

**1 Corinthians 12** teaches these principles. The immediate context deals primarily with a misunderstanding of miraculous gifts given in the 1<sup>st</sup> century before the written Word was complete. These gifts have been done away with (**1 Cor. 13:8-10**), but the principles taught in **1 Corinthians 12** can relate to non-miraculous gifts that Christians have today.

For instance, a Christian who can’t do something(s) another Christian can might be tempted to be discontented with his or her

role in the body, or even envious of the person who has a “more desirable” role. To this attitude, one could respond, “*If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?*” (1 Cor. 12:15). While a foot cannot do much that a hand can do, the foot is just as much a part of the body as the hand is. Moreover, the foot provides unique *value* to the body. The point is that just because a Christian can’t do some things another Christian can, this does not make either one less a part of the body. Nor does it give the member who *seems* to be more important cause for haughtiness. All members of the body are necessary (1 Cor. 12:21-22).

The necessity of all members of the body infers that each Christian must do his or her share for the body to function as God desires. This is exemplified in the Holy Spirit’s teaching about local church growth. For the body to grow, each *member* of the body must be growing (Eph. 4:15-16).

The need for each member of the body to do his or her part is amplified by the fact that members have differing talents, functions, etc. (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:17). Though these differences exist, there is *one* body of Christ, which all members are united together in (Eph. 4:4). Unity with fellow members is thus something to strive for (Eph. 4:1-3), as is proper treatment of those Christ unites us with (cf. 1 Cor. 12:25-26).

Sojourners and Pilgrims – A third portrait of discipleship is alluded to in 1 Peter 2:11. There the inspired apostle Peter referred to Christians as “*sojourners and pilgrims.*”

These words emphasize the fact that this world is not our permanent home. The faithful Christian understands that while our time on earth has great significance, it is just

a temporary pilgrimage. We may have temporal citizenship of some place here on earth, but ultimately “*our citizenship is in heaven*” (Phil. 3:20). Given that Christians are sojourners and pilgrims on earth, we ought not “*mind earthly things*” like those condemned in Philippians 3:19. Instead, we should set our “*affection on things above, not on things on the earth*” (Col. 3:2).

Since this world is not our permanent home, sojourners and pilgrims must refrain from the *worldliness* that most people are given to. This is connected to the exhortation given in 1 Peter 2:11. After referencing Christians as “*sojourners and pilgrims,*” the inspired apostle Peter commanded, “*abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.*” The lusts of the flesh are of the world (1 John 2:16), but the Christian sojourner is not. Sojourners and pilgrims live in the world, but are not of the world. Christ’s faithful followers belong to God, rather than to the world (cf. John 17:15-17).

The differences of those who don’t belong to the world are noticed by those who *do*. These differences are not something to be ashamed of, but can help lead those in darkness to the light (cf. 1 Pet. 2:12).

This isn’t to say that the differences in the lives of sojourners and pilgrims yields no hardships. Many who are of the world express hatred toward those who are not (John 15:18-19). Overcoming this is aided by looking to the permanent dwelling place of the faithful (cf. 2 Cor. 4:18).

May we appreciate these and other portraits of discipleship “painted” for us by God, understanding the depth of both the *commitment* and the *blessings* associated with being a disciple of Christ.

-Michael Hickox