

Spot On

Restoring the Hebraic foundational emphasis on the processes of how you live your life:



- *the responsive actions our Lord commands all of His followers,*
- *and their responsibility to deferentially obey by grace the One they love*

Spot 7. The “Agony” of Striving

Words can hardly express the amazing grace of our Father to fully accept the redemptive suffering and victory of our Lord Jesus on our behalf! Yet how presumptuous if we, like overindulged children who choose to keep feeding our insatiable fleshly selves, never move onward along the narrow pathway to life and the narrow gate.

Even more disastrous for our life journey is choosing to give up the struggle of living set apart for our Father’s use, or to give way to ongoing worldly compromise and idolatrous self-will. Scooting down that broad way of destruction yet still believing that God’s grace covers even ongoing, unrepented sin is the lie of the master deceiver. Countless numbers of churched people keep ignoring or disregarding God’s holy and righteous way of living, and in so doing, tarnish the holy reputation of Jesus.

- Let’s see what our Lord Jesus has to say about how *determined* we who say we belong to Him are in our own faith walk to see Him at journey’s end:

“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.” (Luke 13:24, NIV)

“Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.” (Luke 13:24, NKJV)

*“**Struggle (agonize) to enter** through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”* (Luke 13:24, literal from Greek)

The Greek word for *make every effort* and *strive* implies a **struggle to the point of agony** over your entry into His presence — an ongoing, purposeful resolve that can’t be set aside for the self-gratifying pleasures the rest of the world is enjoying. This “agonizing struggle” is the kind of tenacity which **strains every nerve to the utmost** toward the goal, in this case, receiving our Lord’s welcome on the other side of the open door.

The intent of Jesus here is for you to **deliberately**, with love for Him and for other people, **keep pressing onward in His steps** as the first priority of your life. He made clear that *“His burden is light”* if you are yoked together with Him by His Spirit. But that doesn’t mean the road is free of hazards, pitfalls or potential snares!

As Jesus warns in Luke 13:25-28, when He shuts the door, it will be too late to enter. Your vicarious identification with others who “fellowshipped” under the guise of social activities and even “Bible studies” but never walked in union with Him through His indwelling Spirit are called **“workers of unrighteousness.”** These folks may have clapped each other on the back as “Christians”, but **they lived for themselves**. There-

fore He declares He “*doesn’t know where they came from.*”

What other arenas of “**agonizing struggle**” are each of us who love and serve Jesus as our Lord called upon to engage in?

“Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me.” (Romans 15:30, NKJV)

“I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.” (Romans 15:30, NIV)

*“Now I beseech you, brothers, through our Lord Jesus Christ and through the (agape) love of the Spirit, to **agonize together with me** in prayers on behalf of me to God.” (literal from Greek)*

You’ve probably had those times in your life in which you **agonized in prayer**. Perhaps it was on behalf of a desperate loved one suffering through something which only God could answer. That level of intercession truly was a sense of **contending in a life or death battle for victory** in the heavenlies — which is the essence of the Greek word for **agonizing together** that Paul uses here.

The apostle recognizes the hostility of the disobedient unbelievers in Judea against his call to share the Good News of Christ. But he’s also eager that nothing stand in the way of his labors on behalf of his fellow called-out ones in Jerusalem. So his greatest specific need is to be *rescued out of* a potentially deadly situation, and be *delivered to* a wonderfully welcoming one.

Absolutely confident in the responsiveness of his heavenly Father to answer the fervent prayers of his faith family — his praying brothers and sisters in Christ — Paul sought to galvanize an **intense companionship** in their combined intercession. Again, as with the agonized struggle to enter the narrow gate, there’s an intentional resolute determination in this call to prayer.

Similarly, in Colossians 4:12, Epaphras is commended by Paul as a brother who ***always agonizes in prayer*** on behalf of his countrymen that they “*may stand complete and fully assured in the will of God.*” Can each of us honestly say that such love-driven agony propels our own ongoing prayers for specific people and their needs? Remember, prayer in our Father’s sight *isn’t* a quick “one and done.”

We who follow in the steps of our beloved Master are not in a sprint toward a quick finish line. Rather, our life journey is a marathon of Spirit-empowered obedience and loving reflection of the One Who has run before us.

*“Don’t you know that the ones running in a race all indeed run, but one receives the prize? **So run in order that you may obtain it.** And everyone **struggling (agonizing with all effort toward the goal) exercises self-control in all things** in order that they may receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible one. **I accordingly so run, not uncertainly...** but I treat my body severely and **lead it as a slave** lest having proclaimed to others I myself **may become disapproved.**” (1Corinthians 9:24-27, literal from Greek)*

Paul purposely uses the familiar analogy of a foot race to remind followers of Jesus of the eternal prize which awaits the **persevering individual who agonizes in the struggle**. The “prize” is beyond all doubt worth the agony and effort of finishing the race victoriously. That’s why it’s essential that as a runner you control any tendency to veer off-course toward temptation.

Paul refers to leading our bodies with their sin-prone weaknesses as our “slaves”, not allowing any unChristlike attitude or activity to hinder our run. He wouldn’t have mentioned the possibility of being “disapproved” or unacceptable to the One Who grants the “prize” if that weren’t the case. That’s a good warning for us especially today when all manner of licentious and ungodly behavior is not only tolerated but flaunted, even among those who call themselves “Christian”.

What To Take Away From This Discussion:

When Paul realized his race was almost run, he made sure the same message to keep **focused in perseverance to the narrow-gate goal** sank deeply into the spirit of his beloved disciple Timothy:

*“I have struggled the good struggle (literally, **agonized the good agony**), the course I have finished, the faith I have kept” (2Timothy 4:7, literal from Greek; see also 1Timothy 6:12).*

Don’t let yourself lapse in the popular erroneous concept of “easy believism” as a “Christian”. There’s no “easy” pathway to the narrow gate. By grace Jesus has made the way for us through His death and resurrection, and it’s our responsibility to **keep focused on Him** and **keep fulfilling our Father’s will** for His glory and praise.

Being just a “Christian” will never get you to heaven.