

BE STRONG

2 Timothy 2

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2 Timothy 2:1–26 (NIV)

“You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer. Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor’s crown unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this. Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God’s word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself. Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some.

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Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, 'Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.' In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work. Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will."

I. Transmit the faith.

Paul is certainly in a position now when we see him where he is concerned about the transmission of the faith. The gospel is moving from an apostolic age to an age in which men and women are believing in Jesus Christ on the basis of another generation's testimony. The apostles are soon dying off. Another generation will come into the church who have believed without ever having seen Jesus. The church, at the vantage point of this letter, is in its first throes of persecution from the Roman government. That second generation of Christians is being tested in a special way. The first generation of believers had the direct and clear witness of the Lord. Many of them had seen the Lord. But the second generation had not seen the Lord. They had come to believe as a result of the witness of those who had seen and as a result of the information brought by the Spirit of God.

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It is therefore somewhat not surprising to find that members of that second generation were not as alert to come to Paul's aid and defense because of fear on their part. The transmission of the faith is Paul's concern in the first two verses—if one generation is taken out of the Christian church, if one generation fails to pass it on, then the gospel suffers incalculable loss. One only has to read church history to see that when one generation failed in its task, a thousand years of dark ages may have come. The faith must be passed on. Paul says in these first two verses that we receive the Christian faith as a result of hearing among witnesses. We come to believe because we've heard the glorious message, which is true. But we also come to believe because in the hearing of the message we are surrounded by witnesses who have not only themselves heard but who have experienced what is being talked of in their own lives. So the witness of the gospel is confirmed in the lives of those who hear it.

Paul is seeing the need for transmitting this faith to another age should Jesus tarry. Will the church grow in the second and third generations, which are coming? The position of leadership is all-important. So Timothy is told by Paul, "Get good leaders. Get men who are faithful to lead and get men who are apt to teach."

Why the emphasis on faithfulness? Because in the midst of persecution some were proving unfaithful. And because in the midst of doctrinal and heretical controversy within the church some were giving sway to various heresies. There needed to be faithful persons.

It is a fascinating thing to see that in the darkest hours of the church's persecution the church is also most deeply tested in its inner nature with false teachers which emerge. It seems as if the greater the pressure is on the outside, the greater the pressure is on the inside of the church. So the double threat breaks out simultaneously. Pressure from without and pressure from within.

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Therefore the man of God, the person of God, whether he be leader or not, is faithful and apt to teach.

The transmission of the Christian faith must be a living thing. It must be living in the life of the one who transmits it. This “apt to teach” is a scary thing to anyone who stands behind the pulpit or teaches others. There’s no fate worse than the fate of boredom. “Help me not to be a bore,” is the prayer I pray!

II. Lay hold of godly motivations.

Paul, when he is done with these first two verses in speaking of the transmission of the Christian faith, goes on to speak of the motivations which are now necessary for Timothy to lay hold of.

Timothy in his motivation is to remember that he is to take his share of suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. In fact there are three illustrations that are used very rapidly in verses 3,4,5, and 6. Encouragement is needed for Timothy, and there is suffering that is being experienced both by himself and perhaps by the members of the church that he pastors. Paul himself has gone through suffering. But the Christian always remembers as he goes through suffering and difficulty that, even if life should come to an end in that period of suffering, life is only closed in the ninth inning. And Jesus Christ will always come to bat last. And the winning run is always in the bottom of the ninth. It’s the Christian way of approaching suffering. You know because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ who’s going to win the game. Paul, time and again in these illustrations related to the soldier and the athlete and the farmer, says in the end there’s victory.

Some years ago I read a book which left an indelible illustration on my mind. It was by Oscar Cullmann called *Christ in Time*. He tackled the question of how is it, as believers, we can say that Christ has won a victory for us when all around still we see death and suffering? The answer

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so beautifully came in the way of an illustration. In any given war there is a turning point which comes at some time in the war. The war may not be over for months, for years. But when the armistice is later signed persons can look back and say, “What changed the course of the war?” And they can say, “That battle changed the course of the war.” In effect, the war has been already won because that battle has been fought. What remains is the mopping up operation. That’s how we look at the Cross and the Resurrection. There’s a war that still goes on, but there’s never a doubt of the outcome. The key battle has been fought. Christ has triumphed over death. There’s victory. Paul therefore with confidence can turn to these analogies of the soldier who is marked by obedience, by sacrifice and by loyalty. By the athlete who is marked by self-denial and self-discipline. In fact it’s fascinating to look at verse 5 and see that an athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. In the Greek games there were two kinds of athletes—the pro and the amateur. The pro athlete is one who underwent a strict training regimen. For certain races and particular kinds of contests he had to affirm before the race or the contest began that he had undergone and faithfully obeyed all the rules of the training period. A standard rule for a race was a ten-month training period, where strict rules were laid down. The runner could not run unless he had already kept those rules; he was disqualified.

Paul is saying this analogy applies to the Christian life. There is a race to be run, discipline spiritually to be kept.

Then Paul refers to the farmer.

When Paul is finished giving these three illustrations he says to Timothy, “Think over what I say” (verse 7). Keep in your mind these illustrations, mull them over. The Holy Spirit is going to give you understanding.

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What understanding comes from these? I believe this. The soldier is upheld by the thought of final victory. He can survive through the darkest days because he's training for a cause that he hopes he'll win. The athlete is upheld through the months of discipline and training. By the thought of the laurel wreath, the crown which comes that says he's won the race. The farmer is upheld through the long months when he has to sit and wonder if his crop will appear. The farmer is upheld with the thought of the harvest.

For the Christian, hope is never a wish. Hope is always a certainty. We *hope* in Jesus Christ, not *we wish*.

There's motivation for Timothy not only in these illustrations of the soldier, the athlete and the farmer. But there's motivation by constantly remembering Jesus Christ. Paul says in verse 8, "Remember Jesus Christ." The verb is in the present tense, meaning "Go on remembering." Make it your daily occupation. "Remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead." Risen, not simply in the sense of have having risen a long time ago. But risen and who continues raised. Risen and alive. Remember Jesus Christ the living One. Remember also His humanity, descended from David, that in His hour He also had trials. It is the belief and knowledge of the risen Lord sustained in these times of difficulties.

Paul also is motivating Timothy, reminding him of Paul's association with the gospel. Paul notes in verse 9 that nothing can bind the Word of God although he, Paul, himself is fettered as a criminal. There are only two times in the New Testament where that word "criminal" or "malefactor" is used. It's used in Luke 23 to describe the two thieves that hung on either side of Jesus, who were known for their gross crimes, their thievery and murder. Now Paul says it's applied to himself. A criminal.

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What he means by that, it's interesting to try to guess. One guess, because of the fire in Rome in 64 A.D., Nero blamed the Christians for the fire. It would be natural that he would try to seek out the leaders of the Christian community, like the apostle Paul. So perhaps Paul is in prison under the charge of arson or inciting arson. Therefore a criminal of the worse sort.

Or maybe that term is simply applied to him because he is in a place where there are other persons of that rank. Nevertheless Paul says the Word of God can't be bound. By that Word, Paul prophetically speaks of the course of the gospel in every age. Men may be bound, but the Word is free, the Spirit of God is free.

III. Look to the future with confidence.

Paul is very confidently able to look to the future, in verses 11–13, with a poem or hymn—“If we have died with Him, we'll live with Him. If we endure, we shall reign with Him.” But if the positive is true, so is the reverse. “If we deny Him [as Judas denied—not as Peter who denied on the spur of the moment—but as Judas, who denied premeditatedly, calculatingly]... If we deny Him, He will deny us.” Lest anyone be tempted to deny the Lord in that fashion, Paul must say the Lord is faithful to His word. Even though men may be faithless, the Lord is faithful. Mark 8, Matthew 10 said “He who denies me before men, I will deny before the Father.” Paul is saying Jesus cannot deny that statement. He said He would. Therefore at the end of the age, He must do what He has said. He must remain faithful to that word. Of course, this was an age when denial was an ever-present temptation, and denial is an ever-present temptation for us in a different kind of age and a different kind of culture as well.

IV. Correct false teachers.

Paul then, in verses 14–26, gives a rather lengthy teaching on correcting false teachers. False teaching is a dominant theme of this letter and of 1 Timothy. It occurs in 1 Timothy 1 and 4 and

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6 and now in 2 Timothy 2. Paul tells Timothy some things that he must work on positively to correct false teachers. For example, in verse 14, he is to remind the congregation of this—what has preceded that statement and what is to follow. The temptation of the heretics was to come along and say “Here’s something new! Don’t the people have desire for something new?”

There’s a natural desire for things new, which is good. Then there comes a sort of unhealthy curiosity. To combat the teachers who are always coming across with something new,

Paul says new is not what’s in order here. Remind them of things which are already known.

Avoid word battles, because they can only lead to ruin. The word for “ruin” is “catastrophe.”

They will capsize your faith. But rather present yourself to God as one who has been approved, passed the test. Not needing to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

That word “rightly handling the word of truth” (verse 15) has been used by many Christians to support peculiar and unique ways of understanding Scripture. Sometimes even cutting it apart.

The word “rightly handling” literally means “cut straight.” It was used of men who made a road.

They would cut it straight. It was used of a farmer who would plow a furrow, a straight furrow. It

was used of a stone mason who would cut stones so they would fit straightly into a building. It’s

used here of the Christian teacher to indicate that in relating the Word of God, interpreting it,

proclaiming it, it must be rightly handled—cut straight. One cannot select this part and this part

and ignore other things.

There’s also godless chatter, that which Paul enjoins upon Timothy and other Christians—

“godless” meaning profane and “chatter” meaning empty sounds. The criteria for a discussion

group is this: Is what we are discussing leading us closer to God and toward one another? Or is it

not? William Barclay, in his commentary on this passage, has an eloquent thing to say about the

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danger of discussion. There are times when too much talk can be positively dangerous. Too much talk and too much discussion can have two dangerous effects.

First, it may give the impression that Christianity is nothing but a collection of questions for discussions and problems for solutions. The discussion circle is a characteristic phenomenon of this image. Chesterton said, “We have asked all the questions which can be asked. It is time we stopped looking for questions and started looking for answers.” In any society the discussion circle must be balanced by the action group.

Second, discussion can be stimulating and invigorating for those whose approach to the Christian faith is intellectual. But for those who have a background of knowledge and of culture, for those who are characteristically students, for those who have a real knowledge of or interest in theology, it sometimes happens that a person who has not had this background finds himself in a group which is tossing heresies about and propounding unanswerable questions. It may well be that the faith of that person, far from being helped, is upset. It may well be this is what Paul means when he says that word battles can undo those who listen to them.

The normal word which is used for building a person up in the Christian faith, or “edification,” is the same word that is used literally for building a house. The word which Paul uses here for “ruin” is the word which might well be used for the demolition of a house. It may well happen that clever, subtle, speculative, destructive, intellectually reckless discussion may have the effect of demolishing and not building up the faith of some person who happens to become involved in it. In all things there is a time to discuss and a time for silence.

This godless chatter can have inroads into the Christian community, so much so that Paul said that some were even advocating that the resurrection is past already. These are the first theological liberals. Resurrection is past already. In other words, what their doctrine involved

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was saying this: There is no future bodily resurrection. What is important is that you know Jesus Christ, whoever He is, and follow Him, wherever He is going, wherever that is. Come to know Him spiritually. Believe in Him and you will be raised in your spirit. That's what Christianity is about. It's about the resuscitation or revival of the spirit. Paul says these have denied the faith. We have the glorious hope of the physical resurrection.

Paul, in verses 19–21, still continuing this theme on false teachers, speaks of the true Church. The true Church has a foundation; Paul says it has a seal on it. The seal is the imprint of the architect or the builder, his trademark or mark of ownership of design. On the one side of the stone there is the phrase, "The Lord knows those who are His," and this describes the security of the true Church. God knows His people. On the other side there's another phrase, which calls for the purity of the Church, "Depart from iniquity." Quotations from the sixteenth chapter of the Book of Numbers when God moved among the people to judge a rebellious group headed by Korah. God knows those who are His. Let those who are His depart from iniquity. That is a characteristic which marks the true Church.

Paul recognizes, though, that in the visible church, the church on earth, there is sort of a mixed bag. Jesus indicated this in Matthew 13 when He said the church is made up of wheat and tares. Or wheat and weeds. Paul says it in a different fashion. He says in a great house, in the church of Jesus Christ, there are vessels of gold and silver but there are also menial vessels like that of earthenware and wood. The house had vessels that could be used for the table, things to drink from, to eat from, gold and silver. Then more earthly kinds of things to be used for mop water and latrine responsibilities and other sorts of things. Paul says the church is like this. There are some vessels that are gold and silver. And there are other latrine-like in fashion that fulfill functions that are ignoble. Therefore, Paul says, as you look at what kind of a vessel you are, be

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the right kind of vessel. You have a choice of the vessel. In the great house there are both vessels meaning the gold and silver.

V. Be an example to the believers.

Then, in a series of closing admonitions in the second chapter, Paul indicates to Timothy things he must do as a personal example. There is nothing more powerful in counteracting the false teachers than the personal life that is modeled or displayed by Timothy himself. He is to shun youthful passions. Passions here means to stay away not only from sexual temptations. But it means to stay away from the particular kinds of temptations that are incumbent on younger people. Like impatience, a spirit of criticism, etc.

Aim at righteousness, faith, love and peace. Avoid stupid and senseless quarrels, controversies. Practice kindness, be able in teaching, forbearance, correcting your opponents with gentleness. Why all this concern about correcting your opponents with gentleness? It's because the aim of those who witness to someone who's involved in false teaching is not to win an argument but to win a person. Therefore the manner in which the truth is presented must be kindly.

Have you ever been witnessing to someone whose views were so diametrically opposite from yours that you got so inwardly mad that you wanted to win the argument? Wipe him out. How easy it is to win a case and lose the main thing we're after.

As we kind of overview this second chapter, certain things come to my mind. Has the Holy Spirit through this passage of Scripture today brought into your heart conviction regarding some things you may have neglected to do or some things you have done which are wrong? Always we ask that in reading Scripture because it's a purifying element in my life.

Has the Holy Spirit brought to your awareness any spiritual needs in your life today which need to be made right?

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On your own, this would be an exciting extension of this time together. You can go through this passage of Scripture and ask what qualities of life revealed in this chapter does the Lord want me to have? This chapter is a beautiful chapter describing the character of the Christian believer.

What qualities are there that the Lord wants me to have?

And finally, what personal encouragement is there for me in this chapter? The overriding purpose of this letter is to provide not only correction and counsel for Timothy, but provide encouragement as well. So what encouragement is there?

I take great encouragement in the statement, “Remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead” (2 Timothy 2:8). Remembering that He is the living One. And to put that together with, not only does Jesus Christ live, but we shall live with Him.

As Christians, there is a healthy and holy exercise of imagination that we can practice. We all daydream. There must be a positive way to manage our daydreams. Control them so they don't control us. Next time you're imagining, paint a picture of what it's like to live with the Lord. Imagine it. Make it relationship in your heart. Jesus lives, and I shall live with Him. That's what Paul is telling Timothy to do. Remind yourself of this. Keep on thinking about it. That you might be built up in your faith, encouraged.

Closing Prayer

Lord, in these moments we bring ourselves to You once more in this service, thankful for what we've experienced in this hour together, the wonder of hearing from You. The wonder of being part of a company that stretches through the length of time, back down the centuries, living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ himself. The glory of being in the family of God. All the wonder that is ours in being there. I especially ask, Lord Jesus, there are those who are in this service today who've not yet opened their lives to You or come into Your family. That there would even now

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be a cry from their own hearts of prayer, “Jesus, I confess You. Jesus, I confess my sins. I open my life to You.” Lord, we pray that the graces, the qualities that are being sought for by You in us shall come to pass. That our walk and our talk will be marked by love and gentleness, kindness, faith, purity and in all things we might please You. You who suffered for our sins, who bore stripes on our behalf. We praise You today. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.