

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF SECOND TIMOTHY

ENDURE HARDSHIP FOR CHRIST!

Read 2 Timothy 2:3-15

Introduction.

Last week we studied from this chapter the example of Paul (vv1-2). Timothy was to take what he had learned and teach it to others who would teach still others. This has always been the primary means of spreading the gospel: discipleship. While the written word is important, Christianity has always been meant to be spread through relationship and person-to-person teaching. Also, we looked at the example of a soldier. (vv3-4). Christians are to share in suffering—hardship for the sake of Christ—like a soldier. Soldiers are characterized by their discipline: they are not distracted by "civilian pursuits," they work together as a team, and their primary focus is on following the instructions of their leader. We will start from vv3-4 to create the context for continuation in this chapter.

Enduring Hardship and Suffering

“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.” (vv3-4)

Timothy must take the attitude of soldier who expects to endure hardship for their cause. No real soldier — or at least no good soldier — ever gave up simply because some hardship came to them.

If Timothy did not endure hardship and if he did not put away the things that entangled him in the affairs of this life, he would not be pleasing to his Commanding Officer. Jesus Christ is the commander of all heaven’s armies. In Joshua 5, Jesus appeared to Joshua as Commander of the army of the LORD (Joshua 5:14). He is our Commanding Officer, and we owe total obedience to Him as such. It is likely that Paul was chained to a soldier even as he wrote this. He saw how these soldiers acted, and how they obeyed their commanding officers. Paul knew that this is how a Christian must act towards their Lord.

Persevere for God with an Athlete’s Attitude.

“And also, if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.” (v5)

Paul often drew upon the world of athletics for illustrations of the Christian life, mentioning track and field (1 Corinthians 9:24), boxing (1 Corinthians 9:26), and wrestling (Ephesians 6:12). Paul is making a clear point here. An athlete can’t make up the rules as he pleases; he must compete according to the rules if he wants to receive the crown. It is possible to fall into the mistake of thinking that we can make up our own rules for our Christian life. For some people, their special arrangement goes something like this: “I know this is sin, but God understands, so I’ll just keep going in this sin.” This goes against the attitude of an athlete who must compete according to the rules.

Persevere for God with the Attitude of a Farmer.

“The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops.” (v6)

In calling Timothy to have the attitude of a farmer, Paul emphasized the fact that farmers are hard-working. In the same way, all who serve the Lord should be hard-working. Unlike the soldier and the athlete, there is nothing glamorous about the work a farmer does. It is often tedious, boring, and unexciting. The nation’s best farmer really isn’t a celebrity. But he must work hard just the same.

Paul knew the value of hard work. He could say, comparing himself with the other apostles, I laboured more abundantly than they all (1 Corinthians 15:10). Paul wasn't just called, he wasn't just blessed, he wasn't just anointed; Paul was also hard-working. His ministry would have been far less than it was if he had not worked hard.

Some people expect something for nothing. But wise people know that you often get out of things according to the measure you put into them. If you are putting forth little effort in your Christian walk, you should expect little result. Yet at the same time, Paul knew that all the work he did was the gift of God's grace in him: I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me (1 Corinthians 15:10). Paul knew the balance of working hard, yet always knowing it is all of grace.

Looking to the Lord for Understanding.

“Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.” (v7)

Paul has just explained three illustrations of the Christian life — a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer. Each of these three occupations need great perseverance to succeed.

- The soldier who stops fighting before the battle is finished will never see victory.
- The athlete who stops running before the race is over will never win the race.
- The farmer who stops working before the harvest is complete will never see the fruit of his crops.

Timothy was instructed to see the importance of perseverance, and to receive understanding from the Lord in all these things. God is faithful give us understanding in all these things, and He will be faithful to give us the grace to be strong. God gives this and we must receive it.

Paul's Example of Endurance

“Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained. Therefore, I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” (vv8-10)

Jesus' resurrection was the proof that though it looked like He died on the cross as a common criminal, He died as a sinless man, giving His life out of love and self-sacrifice to bear the guilt of our sin. Jesus' death on the cross was the payment but the resurrection was the receipt, showing that the payment was received as perfect before God the Father.

Paul said “According to my gospel”: Of course, the gospel belonged to Paul in the sense that he preached it; but it also belonged to him in the sense that he believed it. It was his gospel, and it should also be the gospel of each individual Christian. Remember what the word gospel means: good news. For Paul, the best news was not about more money, more love, more status, or more stuff. The good news was about a real relationship with God through the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Paul's Suffering

This gospel did not bring Paul a life of glamour and ease. It brought him a life full of adventure and challenge, and a life also marked by suffering. Any true follower of Jesus Christ will be willing to suffer with Him. Those who are determined to never suffer for Jesus may admire Him from a distance, but they do not genuinely follow Him.

Paul's wrist was shackled at the very moment he wrote this. Nevertheless, he understood that they could chain him, but they could never chain the word of God. The Bible has been attacked more than any other

book through history. It has been burned, banned, mocked, twisted, and ignored — but the word of God still stands forever. *The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever (Isaiah 40:8)*. The word of God is not chained. No government, no religious authorities, no sceptics, no scientists, no philosophers, or no book burners have ever been able to stop the work of the Word of God.

A Trustworthy Saying

“This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.” (vv11-13)

We know what it is like to have a worship song on our mind, one that expressing our heart. Here Paul quoted an early Christian hymn known among the Christians of his day.

- The song begins with a promise of resurrection to those who have died with Jesus.
- The song assures the faithful believer of eternal reward. This principle assures us that our present difficulty or trial is worth enduring. The reward is greater than what one might gain from quitting. We will reign with Him!
- The song warns those who deny Jesus that they themselves will be denied. By doctrine or manner of living, one may deny who Jesus is, deny what He has done for us, or deny what He commands us to do.
- If one does fall away, it doesn't change who God is — He remains faithful.

It is a terrible thing when people who name the name of Jesus show themselves unfaithful; many have been turned off from Jesus because of the hypocrisy of those who take His name. But all the faithlessness of man doesn't disprove the faithfulness of God.

Keep Focused

“Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers.” (v14)

After reminding Timothy of the essential points of the gospel, Paul added that Timothy must always remind his hearers of these things. Timothy's job as a pastor was to keep his congregation always focused on the gospel. The church is constantly tempted to get its focus off of the message that really matters, and is tempted to become an entertainment centre, a social service agency, a mutual admiration society, or any number of other things. But this temptation must be resisted, and the church should constantly remember these things.

To the ruin of the hearers: This shows that it is a serious matter and there is much to lose. If we take the focus off the message of God and put the focus on human opinions and endless debates, it will result in the ruin of the hearers. The Bible says, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17). Yet if people do not hear the word of God, then ruin comes by hearing the opinions and speculations and entertainment of man.

Pay Attention

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (v15)

1. Timothy's goal was not to present himself approved to people, but to God. He wasn't to regard the job of being a pastor as a popularity contest but instead as a call to faithfulness to God.

2. Timothy wasn't to worry so much about presenting other people approved to God (though there was a place for this in his pastoral ministry). His first concern had to be to present himself approved to God.
3. It is embarrassing to do a job poorly and then to have your work examined. The Bible warns us that the work of each Christian will be examined at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). Therefore, we have another motivation to work diligently for the Lord, so we will not be ashamed when our work is examined.
4. Rightly dividing the word of truth was to be a focus of Timothy's hard work. He was to work hard so he could rightly divide the word of God.

Timothy, as a faithful pastor, was to be rightly dividing God's Word. That is, he had to know what it said and didn't say, and how it was to be understood and how it was not to be understood. It wasn't enough for Timothy to know some Bible stories and verses and sprinkle them through his sermons as illustrations. His teaching was to be a "right dividing" of the Word of God, correctly teaching his congregation.

"Rightly Dividing" also means there is such a thing as wrongly dividing; not everyone cuts it straight. We must understand that Biblical truth is not just an issue left up to everyone's interpretation. There is a right way and a wrong way to understand the Bible, and a pastor especially must work hard to master the right interpretation.

Avoid Godless Chatter and False Teaching

"But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."" (vv16-19)

We already met Hymenaeus in 1 Timothy (1 Timothy 1:19-20). Philetus is a new name to us. His name means "amiable," but his influence in the church was something else entirely. Together these false teachers have not only "shipwrecked their faith" (1 Timothy 1:19), they also "destroy the faith of some" (2 Timothy 2:18). They are dangerous men, whose teachings are like "gangrene," which, if allowed to spread, can eat itself into healthy tissue and destroy it.

Here we get a glimpse of one of the false teachers' aberrant doctrines: *"saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some."* The result was that the false teachers had "upset" (NRSV) or "overthrown" (KJV) the faith of some in the Ephesian church. The verb *"anatrepō"* means literally "to cause something to be overturned, cause to fall, overturn, destroy." False doctrine comes at a high price to the church!

God's Firm Foundation Will Stand

What is this solid foundation that stands?

1. The Lord knows those who are His! Are you His?
2. Let all who name the name of Christ depart from iniquity! If departing from iniquity is part of God's firm foundation then to be part of God's building, you must depart from iniquity.