

2 Timothy 2: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] 2 Timothy chapter 2 You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal.

But the word of God is not bound. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

The saying is trustworthy, for if we have died with him, we will also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we deny him, he also will deny us.

[1 : 1 0] If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself. Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers.

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene.

Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. But God's firm foundation stands, bearing the seal, the Lord knows those who are his, and let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.

Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honourable use, some for dishonourable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonourable, he will be a vessel for honourable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

So flee youthful passions, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies.

[2 : 3 5] You know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.

God may perhaps grant them repentance, leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses, and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

From the cautionary examples of those who had abandoned him, and the positive example of Onesiphorus in his household, Paul turns to address Timothy more directly.

Relying upon the empowering grace of Christ, Timothy needs to teach what he has learnt from Paul to others in his turn. Paul's statement in verse 2 should draw our minds back to chapter 1, verses 13 and 14.

The deposit that Timothy was told to God in the preceding chapter is now one that he has instructed to entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others in their turn.

[3 : 45] For Paul, it is very important that things get passed on. The concern here is not one of apostolic succession, so much as this is a concern of preserving the apostolic faith, maintaining it by a healthy process of tradition, handing it on to a new generation in its turn, to people who are equipped to continue that process.

Employing a military metaphor, Paul charges Timothy to courageously face and endure suffering. He is to be a good soldier of Christ Jesus. We might think here of the language of putting on the whole armour of God in Ephesians chapter 6.

The Christian is a soldier fighting a battle. The stakes are life and death, and loyalty, courage and struggle are non-negotiable. Developing the military metaphor, in verses 4 to 6, Paul gives three different examples of vocations that provide analogies for the Christian faith.

The soldier, the athlete and the farmer are all different sorts of examples of diligence and hard work in pursuit of a particular goal with the promise of a reward. Paul notes the single-mindedness of the soldier.

He does not get entangled in civilian pursuits. He is there to fight a battle and to be loyal to his commander. More than anything else, he seeks to please the one who enlisted him.

[5 : 00] In Paul's use of the analogy here, the one who enlisted the Christian is Christ Jesus himself. Whatever we do, we must do in order to please him. Paul also uses the analogy of the soldier in 1 Corinthians chapter 9 verse 7.

Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? The example of the athlete is one that Paul uses later on in that chapter in 1 Corinthians, in verses 24 to 25.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things.

They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. The athlete competes and struggles for the sake of a reward. However, to obtain this reward, he needs to compete according to the rules.

The final example that Paul gives is the hard-working farmer. The soldier is singled out by his aim to please the one who enlisted him, the athlete by his competing according to the rules, and the hard-working farmer by the reward that he receives.

[6 : 08] Each of these illustrations allows Paul to pick out a particular facet of the Christian's vocation. Paul wants Timothy to meditate upon his statements at this point, believing that he will receive greater insight as he does so.

Each of the metaphors in question occur on a number of occasions within Paul's writing. For instance, the athletic metaphor can also be seen in Philippians chapter 3, verses 12 to 14.

Not that I have already obtained this, or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind, and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Verses 8 to 10 are a single sentence. Once again, Paul's concern here is that Timothy get his bearings. He needs to remember Jesus Christ, and from taking his bearings by reflecting upon Christ, he will have a clearer idea of how he ought to behave.

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, the offspring of David. This pairing might remind us of Romans chapter 1, verses 3 to 4. Concerning his son, who was descended from David according to the flesh, and was declared to be the son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

[7 : 30] As the one risen from the dead, Jesus has been vindicated, he has been elevated by God, he is the offspring of David, he is the true Messiah. These are absolutely staple truths of Paul's gospel, and he is suffering for this, not just with physical lack, but also with the social shame that comes with being a bound criminal.

Yet Paul's physical condition of imprisonment could not contrast more with the condition of the word of God. The word of God is not bound, it cannot be shackled, and as a result, Paul is confident as he undergoes suffering for the sake of it.

In Philippians chapter 1, for instance, Paul can speak of his situation of imprisonment in a manner that expresses his wonder at the way that the Lord has used his situation to advance his own kingdom purposes.

Paul will willingly undergo such suffering for the sake of the elect. By the elect here, he is referring to the church of Jesus Christ. His concern is that the riches of Christ be given to his people, and that his people be led through the trials and struggles of this age, through the shepherding that Paul and others provide, to obtain the fullness of the reward that the Lord has set apart for them.

To underline his point, he refers to a fourfold affirmation. If we have died with him, we will also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we deny him, he also will deny us.

[8 : 49] If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself. The first statement concerning dying and then living with Christ might recall Romans chapter 6 verse 8.

Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. The Christian's identification with Christ and his death, in Romans chapter 6 connected with baptism, is a source of assurance of future resurrection, a truth that will be important in attacking the error that Paul later speaks of.

This shouldn't be seen as just a once-off event back in the time of people's baptism. It should be seen as an ongoing participation. There was a definitive death with Christ, which must continually be lived out in the believer's life.

Likewise, there is an anticipated event of future resurrection, of living with him, but also an ongoing participation in the reality-filled promise and guarantee of that by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us as a down payment.

In the present we must endure sufferance, confident that if we do so, we will attain what we have been promised, we will reign with him. We might here recall Paul's charges to Timothy in verses 3-6.

[9 : 58] Those who disown Christ will be disowned by Christ. True disciples must deny themselves and follow Christ, and as they deny themselves and acknowledge Christ, they will be acknowledged by Christ on the last day.

Luke chapter 9 verses 23-26 And he said to all, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?

For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. After the relative symmetry of the first three statements, Paul's fourth statement might surprise us.

There are various ways that people have taken this statement. Some have taken it as a statement that Christ will save even those who waver in faith. Others that Christ is faithful in his punishing of those who are faithless.

[10:59] However, I don't think that Paul is making either of these claims at this point. Rather, his point is that everything is founded ultimately upon the faithfulness of God, not upon the faithfulness of the people of God.

Even when human beings prove faithless, God is still going to work out his purposes faithfully. He will keep his promises. He will uphold his covenant. None of this ultimately rests upon our faithfulness.

And on the occasions when we have proved faithless, it is to this faithfulness of God that we should flee. We might think, perhaps, of 1 John 1 verse 9. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

It was the faithfulness of God that Moses appealed to in Exodus chapter 32 to 34 when he interceded for Israel after their sin with the golden calf. For the Lord to abandon his faithfulness would be for the Lord to abandon his very nature.

He cannot deny himself. This should be the greatest source of comfort for those who are penitent. Paul is concerned that Timothy and others around him are able to deal effectively with false teaching in their midst.

[12:07] The false teachers are particularly fond of quarrels. Their teaching leads to conflict and division. They are unteachable and resist correction. Blind to the true substance of the faith, they are preoccupied with quarrelling about words, to the detriment of all of their hearers.

The way of the false teachers is driven by pride, by desire for the praise of men and for a following around themselves. Timothy, by contrast, should seek above all else the praise of the Lord.

He should desire to be recognised as a faithful servant, a worker who does not need to be ashamed. And his business is with the word of truth, which he must handle with care. Discerning true and false words and edifying and unedifying speech is the business of someone like Timothy.

He must be alert to the way that false teachers and their speech impact those who hear them. He must perceive specific types of discourse and the way that they have particular tendencies.

For instance, the irreverent babble of such as Hymenaeus and Philetus and the way that it can spread through a community like Gangrene. This Hymenaeus is probably referred to in 1 Timothy chapter 1 verses 18 to 20.

[13:14] This charge I entrust to you, Timothy my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience.

By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme. The exact nature of their teaching is not clear.

Paul says that they are saying that the resurrection has already happened. Their over-realised eschatology has been connected by some to a sort of Gnosticism. As Christians are baptised into Christ, for instance, they obtain the resurrection of Christ here and now.

Or perhaps the teaching is based in Christ's own resurrection, believing that Christ's resurrection has precipitated the arrival of the age to come, and we already participate in that. Or perhaps the teaching is a greatly over-realised version of something similar to what Paul is teaching.

In the life of the church now, we are participating in the resurrection life of Christ. In baptism we were raised with him, and now we are living by the life of the resurrection spirit.

[14 : 19] We're not awaiting some future event. It's already happened. Now, of course, Paul does teach that we participate in the resurrection spirit, that we have already in some sense been raised with Christ.

However, Paul has a very strong already-not-yet framework for understanding these things. We still await this salvation to be realised in its fullness in the future. There is still a final resurrection, and if we only have hope in this life, we are of all people the most pitiable.

All of this is unsettling a number of people within the church, and perhaps Timothy is also somewhat rattled when he sees the apparent success that the false teaching is having in these congregations.

In the face of this widespread faithlessness, Paul wants to remind Timothy of the Lord's faithfulness. The sure foundation of God is not our faith, but his faithfulness.

The language of the foundation might be an allusion back to Isaiah chapter 28 verse 16. Therefore thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone of a sure foundation.

[15 : 26] Whoever believes will not be in haste. This verse is read in a messianic way by Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament. Paul here argues that it has a seal, something that validates the one who laid it.

The Lord knows those who are his, and let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity. The Lord is building his house upon this foundation, and this basis remains sure.

When we see people we once presumed to be Christians who have fallen away, we should not lose our nerve. We should return once more to the foundation and take our bearings from that. The statement, The Lord knows those who are his, might be an allusion back to a key narrative in Numbers chapter 16, in verse 4 to 5 of that chapter.

When Moses heard it, he fell on his face, and he said to Korah and all his company, In the morning the Lord will show who is his, and who is holy, and will bring him near to him.

The one whom he chooses, he will bring near to him. And then later on in that chapter, in verse 26, Perhaps in a manner comparable to that of the false teachers here with Hymenaeus and Philetus and others like them, in Numbers Moses and Aaron were challenged by Korah and his company, and the Lord made a great division in his people, destroying Korah and all who were with him.

[16 : 54] Recognizing the sort of divisions made by the Lord, the faithful servant of the Lord must be concerned to cleanse himself, so that he will be useful to the master, ready for every good work. The church here is spoken of as a great house, and perhaps Paul's point is that, just as in a great house there are noble vessels that are put up on the shelf and honoured, and treated as items of great value, while there are also other vessels that are used for common use, that aren't respected at all, and will soon be disposed of as they are broken or used.

So the church is a place with a mixed company, with vessels of honour set apart for the master's special purpose, and then dishonourable vessels like the false teachers, that will be discarded with the recycling.

As those within this house, it is imperative that we seek to be members of the former company. We will be members of this group as we cleanse ourselves, and as Paul highlights in verse 22, as we flee youthful passions, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace.

He is ironic. He is not someone who is seeking to cause fights. He is kind and considerate of others, seeking to understand where they are coming from, and to speak carefully into their situations.

A good leader will not make the opposition about him. The good leader can endure unreasonable treatment aimed at himself, without being blown off course. When people attack him, he draws attention to Christ.

The good teacher is engaged with people without being constantly entangled and enmeshed with them. Such a teacher is the most apt person to lead others to repentance. He is not trying to win a fight.

[19 : 28] A question to consider. What are some of the practices of the faithful leader that would equip him to behave in the way that Paul describes here?