

Be Strong In Grace

2 Timothy 2:1-7

Introduction

In Paul's final note to Timothy he lays out several urgent charges to Timothy: be prepared to endure abuse for the sake of the Gospel (1:6-12); hold fast to the Lord Jesus Christ (1:13-18); and now be strong in the Lord Jesus Christ (2:1-7). In order to be strong in Jesus Timothy must be strong in grace (v.1); the truth (v.2a) and carry on the work of the gospel (v.2b). In this section Paul likens the role of the minister to four secular occupations; (1) a teacher (vv.1-2); a soldier (vv.3-4); an athlete (v.5) and a farmer (vv.7-8). As a student Timothy was taught many things by Paul and now Timothy must be willing to instruct others. Like a soldier Timothy must devote his energies to the warfare and not the world (vv.3-4). Like an athlete he must run the race and stay focused on the victor's crown (v.5). Like a farmer he must work hard in order to reap the largest crop possible (vv.6-7). The ministry is fraught with dangers. Later in this chapter Paul will remind Timothy that Jesus is the resurrected Lord (2:8-13); and will warn Timothy about the danger of divisive words and urge his young protege to keep intact the foundations of God and the gospel (2:14-21). Paul warns of a coming apostasy; a great falling away (chapter 3). He will cite perversions (3:1-9) and those who perpetrate the perversions. Men and women; weak-willed; sin-burdened; depraved; who oppose God as Jannes and Jambres once opposed Moses (vv.3:8-9). Once Dr. Paul makes his diagnosis he offers a prescription: continue the work of God (3:10-13); and continue in the Word of God (3:14-17). All that will require strength, fortitude. The ministry requires a kind of mental and emotional and spiritual toughness and resolve. I am not talking about the strength that makes one angry, or a bully or insecure. I am talking about a spiritual toughness and strength that makes one patient, and kind and gracious.

The minister's super power is grace. Not just any grace. But the supernatural grace that is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. Spurgeon told his congregation "It is not true gold if it will not stand the fire, and it is not true grace, if it will not bear affliction."

Be Strong In Grace (v.1)

2 Timothy 2:1-2 (NKJV) You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Paul is facing death. He will soon be executed by the Roman government on the false charges of sedition against Nero's rule. Timothy was to serve as his successor; he was charged with the leadership and oversight of the various churches scattered throughout the Roman Empire.

Some of Paul's critics were unhappy with both Paul and Timothy. Would Timothy be able to bear the weight and burden and pressure? Could he handle the inevitable criticisms and ministry mine-fields? Can anyone fill Paul's apostolic shoes? Who is sufficient for such things? What training or spiritual disciplines can prepare leaders for all the problems we face living in a broken world? Paul has poured his life and teachings into Timothy. And like his mentor Timothy has become the target of criticism.

Be Strong In Grace

2 Timothy 2:1-7

All human beings no matter how gifted have limited resources. But there is a pool, a reservoir, a stream where fresh strength flows without interruption or pollution. Grace. Not just any grace but the grace that is found in Christ Jesus the Lord. Amazing grace. Sufficient grace.

Timothy's hope is your hope and my hope. We pray. We work hard. We study. We witness. We preach. We teach. We endure hardship and set back and criticism. We pray in the Spirit. We wage war with supernatural powers. **But even the most gifted and called have limitations. Where will Timothy find the resources to fulfill his call?** Where will you find the resources to fulfill your calling in Christ? It must be found in the grace that is Christ Jesus the Lord. **Grace is a rich word full of meaning. It means the *undeserved favor and blessings of God.*** The favors and blessings of God are all undeserved. None of us deserve God's grace. Yet there is the Lord Jesus Christ bringing us God's love and truth and forgiveness of sin.

In First Timothy (1:2) Paul called Timothy "my own son in the faith" or true son in the faith. It would seem that Timothy was just a child when Paul first visited Lystra on his first missionary journey. On his second missionary journey Timothy may have been about 18 years old. It may be that Paul led Timothy to the Lord but more likely his mother and grandmother were the instruments God used in Timothy's conversion. Timothy's biological father was a Greek and his mother a believer and a Jew. Timothy was not circumcised which may mean he was educated in Greek language, culture and customs. At the beginning of this letter Paul called Timothy "my dearly beloved son" (1:2) and now "my son".

Paul invites Timothy "to be strong in grace". Some have interpreted this to mean that perhaps Timothy struggled with being a bit timid (see 1:7-8). Did Timothy struggle? Whether he did or didn't Paul's admonition is clear—remember your gifting (1:6); don't be ashamed of either the Lord's testimony, the gospel or Paul (1:8-10). Jesus is our source for grace.

The famous Puritan Richard Baxter wrote; "I take the love of God and self-denial to be the sum of all saving grace and religion." By religion he meant the revelation of Jesus to humanity.

We are invited to be strong, not simply in our own strength or our own resources; but rather in the grace of God that is found in Christ Jesus. His grace is our strength. We are invited to consider the sufficiency of Christ. Timothy knew Paul's letter to the Ephesians and understood that we are accepted in the Beloved to the "praise of the glory of His grace" (1:6). We are forgiven "according to the riches of His grace" (1:7). We are saved by grace that is, through His loving act, quite apart from who we are (2:5,8). We are made trophies of his love through "the exceeding riches of His grace" (2:7).

"No one is safe by his own strength, but he is safe by the grace and mercy of God" (*Cyprian*).

I had the privilege of interviewing Joni Eareckson Tada on my radio program. She was paralyzed from the neck down in a diving accident at age 18.

Be Strong In Grace

2 Timothy 2:1-7

She wrote; “God doesn’t just give us grace, He gives us Jesus, the Lord of grace.”

The term *be strong or be empowered (endunamou)*—implies strength from an outside source (see *Life Application Bible Commentary*; p. 171).

Paul’s first appeal is to rely on an outside source. This is not Paul’s power or even his example but from Christ and Christ’s power. There are examples of strength throughout the Bible. Paul makes clear that we receive strength at the point of weakness,, when we acknowledge our limitations and then God decides to use us (see 2 Corinthians 12:9). We are given a sword to fight with and armor to withstand the enemy (see Ephesians 6:10-11).

Hold Fast The Truth (v.2a)

2And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses,

What has Timothy heard from Paul? The two have spent literally years together. In the broadest terms possible Timothy heard Paul preach and teach the Gospel. This the sum and substance of the truth Paul received by revelation through Jesus Christ; the testimony of the other apostles and the numerous challenges Paul and Timothy shared in the course of the ministry. There were several people who could bear witness or confess to these things; it might include Barnabas and Silas and John Mark and of course Luke. No ministry is immune from ministry defectors and detractors. People come and go for a variety of reasons. But there were still plenty of people who could attest to Paul’s faithful teaching and preaching and discipleship. Paul received the truth gladly. Paul lived the truth faithfully.

Make Disciples (v.2b)

2b . . .commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

The faithful teacher transmits the truth to faithful men. Let’s talk about that for just a moment. The word faithful (*pistis*) means a person who *believes in Jesus, trusts Jesus and has a demonstrated lifestyle of loyalty to the person and teachings of Jesus*. That includes all the elements we normally mean when we use the word faithful. Words like loyal, reliable, dependable, trustworthy.

William Barclay describes this person; “*Every Christian must look on himself as a link between generations. Not only has he received the faith; he must also pass it on. E.K. Simpson writes on this passage: The torch of heavenly light must be transmitted unquenched from generation to another, and Timothy must count himself an intermediary between apostolic and later ages. . .The teacher is a link in the living chain which stretches unbroken from this present moment back to Jesus Christ. The glory of teaching is that it links the present with the earthly life of Jesus Christ*”(*The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, p.181).

Be Strong In Grace

2 Timothy 2:1-7

Chuck Smith taught that ministry is both caught and taught. Teaching and discipleship cannot be limited or restricted to the Pastor or even leaders of a church but must incorporate gifted men and women who are willing and able.

Models In Ministry (vv.3-7)

v.3 You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 4 No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. 5 And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. 6 The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops. 7 Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.

Paul adds several more models for ministry. He thinks of a soldier, an athlete and a farmer.

The Soldier

v.3 You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

Not everyone is cut out for the military. This is a metaphor. Ministry involves hardship. Soldiers face fatigue and deprivation. The NRSV says “Share in suffering like a good soldier” the same word Paul uses earlier when he invites Timothy “Join with me in suffering for the gospel” (1:8). For the person who has no theology of suffering or way of coping with suffering than Christ and Christianity will seem bizarre. Paul returns to one of the great themes of this letter; when you are faithful to the truth, when you are unwilling to twist the truth or distort the truth or deny the truth; living loving and preaching the truth invites persecution; and persecution leads to suffering. Jesus gives ample and repeated warnings that His faithful followers will experience persecution. All who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. Not everyone is cut out to be a soldier. This is Calvary Chapel. Calvary is the place where they crucified the Savior. Calvary is the address of suffering and the zip code where all the parcels marked hardship are sent. In one sense we are the Salvation Army. We are God’s soldiers. We must be trained and equipped for the battle. We share a common experience familiar to missionaries and martyrs.

(v.4) No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life.

The soldier’s life takes precedence over the affairs of civilian life. The soldier has a keen sense of mission. The pastor’s singular mission is to preach and teach the truth and if necessary suffer for it.

Some have taken Paul’s advice to mean there is no place for participation in this world or its affairs. We can strain the metaphor. Even soldiers need supplies and rest. Wounded soldiers need first aid. Even soldiers who manage to avoid bullets and capture need relief from the battle.

Be Strong In Grace

2 Timothy 2:1-7

How do we maintain a healthy balance as we read Paul's words and consider his concerns about the ever increasing danger of false teachers, false teaching and as more and more people compromise the truth or abandon the truth?

The Athlete

Paul employs another metaphor. The athlete who competes for a crown. This is no ordinary athlete. This not the person who stays fit or works out. This is the athlete who tests his or her skills against others for prizes. Ancient Olympic athletes were governed by rules on and off the field. Did you know there were rules around training? All Olympic athletes were required to swear that they had trained for at least 10 months; and then that only allowed you to participate in the competition. Every event was governed by specific rules for that event. Those who competed fairly were eligible for the victor's crown. What rules do you think Paul has in mind as he offers this metaphor? Different people have offered different suggestions. Could it mean that we train more than we compete? Does Paul want the Christian to think that the Christian life is a rules based life? Clearly we live under the rule of Christ. And the context is strength that is given by grace! Jesus trained His disciples in the competition—which might mean our ministry to the Church and the watching world.

The Farmer

What can we learn from the farmer? Farming is hard work. It involves detailed disciplined work. Soil does not till itself. Seed does not plant itself. Plants do not water themselves. Livestock require attention. Crops do not harvest themselves.

“If the soldier enjoys the commander's approval, and the athlete enjoys the victory, then the hardworking farmer can enjoy the results of his or her labor. Those results may not be received “immediately,” but most certainly the fruits will be received from Christ in eternity” (see again *Life Application Bible Commentary 1&2 Timothy/Titus p. 178*).

Conclusion

C.K. Barret wrote; “Beyond warfare is victory, beyond athletic effort a prize, and beyond agricultural a crop.”

How can we consider what Paul says (v.7)? What's your point Paul? What does it mean to share the crops? Paul may have wondered will Timothy understand these important points? Will the Lord give Timothy supernatural understanding and application? Will you understand? Every Pastor must remember that it is God's Spirit and God's Word that has the final say in the heart of God's servants. It may mean that the hard work of the minister will have practical benefits or spiritual benefits or even financial benefits.

Be Strong In Grace

2 Timothy 2:1-7

How can I be strong in God's grace?

How can I be strong in God's Word?

How can I be strong when things are hard and suffering has made its way into my life?

We must understand and embrace God's grace in Christ.

Many years ago while teaching through the book of Romans I came across William Newell's commentary on the book of Romans. In Romans chapter 6 Paul pleads that believers must be aware of three facts: They have been crucified with Christ (6:1-3). They have been resurrected with Christ (6:4-5). They are now both dead and alive (6:6-10). They are dead to sin and alive in the Savior. Paul argues persuasively that we are to count our crucifixion and resurrection in Christ as accomplished events. We know (vv.1-10); reckon (6:11) and yield (6:12-23). We are not to yield our bodies as instruments of wickedness but rather of righteousness. God's grace has set us free from the law and we have a new Master. Newell writes "To believe, and to consent to be loved while unworthy, is the great secret." The proper attitude of men and women under grace includes; "to expect to be blessed, though realizing more and more a lack of worth. To testify of God's goodness, at all times. To be certain of God's future favor; yet to be ever more tender in conscience toward Him. To rely on God's discipline as a mark of his kindness. Newell explains what Christians experience when they are strong in grace:

1. To hope to be better is to fail to see yourself in Christ only.
2. To be disappointed with yourself, is to have believed in yourself.
3. To be discouraged is unbelief,—as to God's purpose and plan of blessing for you.
4. To be proud is to be blind! For we have no standing before God, in ourselves.
5. Real devotion to God comes first—not from man's will but rather based on the reality of what we have already received from God in Christ.
6. The law made man's blessing depend on devotion; *grace confers undeserved, unconditional blessing: our devotion may follow, but does not always do so,—in proper measure (See William Newell's Commentary on Romans 245-247).*

In grace we fulfill our duties. Like a teacher we demonstrate competence in the subject matter and teach others. Like a soldier we give all our energies to the mission. We are no longer civilians. And so we are unconcerned with civilian affairs. Like an elite athlete we must devote ourselves to a routine of discipline that allows us to compete at the highest levels. We don't simply want to compete, we want to win. And like a farmer we will work hard to ensure an abundant harvest.