

**Fundamental Christian Attitudes: Strength, Part 1**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 90-126

Well, we've had such a wonderful time traversing through the anatomy of the church and considering the issues of life in the church that are important to us as they're outlined in the Word of God. As we've been saying all along, much today is being written, much is being spoken about the church, but not all of it is soundly and solidly biblical. Not all of it reflects the mind and will of God. And we've endeavored to put ourselves in touch with the church by going into the Word of God and identifying those things which are essential, salient to the very life of the church. We've taken the body of Christ metaphor which Paul uses, and we've expanded and extended it a little bit, taken some liberty to fill in some blanks, as it were, and to what the anatomy of the church really encompasses.

We started out talking about the skeleton, and now we're talking about the internal systems, those things that give the church its real life, such as the organs give the body its real life, those things that flow, that carry the life and energy and power and function of the church. And basically we've been talking about spiritual attitudes. That's the best term I know to describe what we're talking about. We're talking about the spiritual attitudes that are the life of the church, things like faith and love and humility and unity and forgiveness and thanks and contentment and things like joy, those kinds of things that are the attitudes that characterize the church and that sustain its life and carry its energy.

And I want to go on with this for a little bit. I'm not just doing this arbitrarily, my problem is narrowing these things down, not thinking them up, that's easy. There are a myriad of things that we could consider. But we're trying to get to the real core issues.

And today I want to come to another attitude that I think will probably take us two weeks to cover, this morning, tonight, next week and next Sunday night as well, cause it's such a very, very important component. I guess in a word it would be "strength" that I want to talk about, strength. You might call it fortitude, you might call it courage, but really the best word is strength.

Certainly in any consideration of the human body, strength is of grave importance. It's important if a body is going to be able to function at its maximum potential that it have a measure of strength and not be weak. There are a myriad of things that weaken the human body and we do everything we can, from a medical standpoint, and an exercise standpoint, and a dietary standpoint, to minimize those things which can assault the strength of the body. We want to do everything we can to maintain strength. Well the same thing is true in the life of the church. There needs to be an internal strength if the church is to function in the way that God wants it to function.

Now what are we talking about when we're talking about strength? Well we're talking about courage, we're talking about things like the courage of conviction, we're talking about standing firm, we're talking about being an uncompromising individual, someone who is not weak, who is not vacillating, defeated, who is not fearful, frightened, someone who has courage and boldness who can confront and who can be persecuted and intimidated, and yet be true in every sense to what is right. We're talking about somebody who doesn't give way to fear. Somebody who doesn't seek the easy path. Somebody who isn't looking for the safe place. Somebody who lives on principle. We're talking about having the courage of what you know is true so that you don't vary those convictions from situation to situation. Someone who stands strong against opposition. Someone brave enough to face challenges. Someone who lives by principle and not by whim and not by opinion. Someone who has firm and strong and fixed purposes and moves toward those purposes, meeting the enemy, bearing the pain, upholding the right, pressing to the goal. That's the kind of virtue that makes someone strong, decisive. Someone who will take risks, serious risks for the sake of truth and principle. That's what we're talking about.

And that is a virtue greatly in need in the church today, in a time of great vacillation, in a time of tremendous compromise, in a time of weakness. The church needs to be strong. And we're not talking just about strength of personality, although we like that as a virtue. We like people who have strong personalities. In fact, we even like people if they're not Christians who have strong convictions. There's something manly about that. There's something good about a resolute person who lives according to what he believes is right. We like strength of character. We like nobility in people's character. We give honor to that. Who see virtue as important. Who see consistency as important.

Even the word "integrity" is a wonderful word, it means somebody whose life is consistent. All the parts are perfectly integrated. That's integrity. We honor that.

Well certainly in the spiritual realm it goes beyond a preference and becomes a mandate. We need, in the church, strength. And we live in a time when a premium is frankly being placed on weakness...on weakness. As one prominent pastor told me, "You're problem, MacArthur, is you just take things too seriously, you need to lighten up." Church light...like Miller Light, you know. Take out all the punch, I guess.

This is a time of weakness. This is a time of wimpishness. This is a time of vacillation. This is a time of compromise. This is a time of "let's not make ourselves offensive by holding strong doctrinal convictions." You understand all that. Never was there perhaps a more desperate need for strength than there is right now. As I have told numerous pastors groups through the years recently, this is not a time for weak men in weak pulpits preaching weak messages to weak people. This is a time for strength.

I want to talk about strength. And I have a rather long introduction, so don't grade my outline until I get there. Let's talk about this. Turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 16 and verse 13. Now the Bible says a lot about strength. It says in Romans 4:20 that Abraham was strong in faith. It says in Hebrews 11:34 that there were great heroes of the faith who in weakness became strong, great verse, verse 34, "They in weakness became strong." Paul said God's strength was perfected in his weakness. Ephesians 6:10 Paul says, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." The Bible talks a lot about being strong. It gives us models. Read Hebrews 11 and see all the models of strong faith.

But there's a statement here in the sixteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, the thirteenth verse, that really sums it up and it's just a very simple exhortation. It isn't even very much dependent upon the immediate context. It's just sort of stuck there and most translations of Scripture will identify verses 13 and 14 as a very brief paragraph because they really do exist, almost apart from what comes before and what comes after. And this is what it says in verse 13 and 14, "Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love." You don't forfeit love but you act like men and you are strong. My, this is an important, important essential exhortation.

Now what does it mean? Verse 13 is somewhat an unfortunate translation, I think. The translation is "act like men." But that's really not what the Greek verb says. What the Greek verb says is, "Conduct yourself in a courageous way." This is what Greek students call hopaxlugamina(???) which means it's the only place in the New Testament where this verb is used. So we don't have comparative New Testament passages to give us a little help in understanding it, but it's basic meaning is to conduct oneself in a courageous way.

And may I suggest to you that the reason the translators translated it "act like men" was because in ancient times being a man was synonymous with being courageous. Life had a lot more risks in Paul's time. It had a lot more risks even in the Old Testament time. And if you ask yourself...how do men act? If we as Christians are told to act like men, how do men act? In our society, oh, that might be hard to answer. They act all kinds of ways. I mean, they act bizarre, some of them. Some of them act like women. Some of them go to the other extreme and act in other bizarre and harmful and disastrous ways and everything in the middle. But there was a time in the world and there are still places in the world where men is synonymous with courage and strength. There was a time, as you might well know, that being a man meant carving out life in a difficult environment. It meant building with your hands. It meant clearing. It meant plowing. It meant protecting your family from raiding tribes, from those wars that occurred in the little dominions all over the world, not like big world wars that burst on the scene in this century. Not post-industrial revolution when we began to develop weaponry and arms. There was a time in the world when you defended your property and you defended your life and you defended your family with your hands and you were in mortal combat and you carved out your existence with bodily strength and resoluteness and you worked hard and you sweat and you poured out your energy.

I mean, you just read the Old Testament and just put yourself in that environment of the very difficult times that are chronicled for us as diseases and plagues and wars and attacks and assaults and the difficulty of labor carried the life along. And men were men in times like that. They had to be men and women knew their role and they were to support the men, they were to undergird them with the care and the raising of the children and instruction to those children and the care of the home and the provision of meals and all those things that gave women their unique and marvelous balance. But men were men and men had to do what men had to do. That meant being strong and bending their back and moving their muscles, not at the local gym so they could take their shirt off and have people stare at their abs. But for other reasons like protecting their wife and children from invaders. Far more serious issues were at hand.

We live in a time when the closest men get to conflict is maintaining their emotional equilibrium on I-5 at rush hour. The closest we get to conflict is throwing our Pepsi at the TV when our hero in the football game is losing. We're not used to that kind of effort, and many of us, obviously, in this society are involved in service industries where we don't do the kind of work that men did in past times, and as a result of that, we have to do other things just to maintain normal health because we don't exercise the way men in other times did. We...we have sort of redefined the role of a man in our society greatly from what it used to be. Being a man was synonymous with being courageous in those times, and that's why translators would feel the liberty to take a verb that basically means to exist...to express courage which exists in the heart, and translate it "act like men."

The New Testament gives us no illustrations of this verb, but fortunately the Old Testament gives us a lot of them. In the Septuagint, which is a Greek translation of the Old Testament, which is good to study because you can see how Greek words were used in the Old Testament and that tells us something about the Hebrew intent of the word as well, as the translators chose the right Greek word to match up. And as you go to the Old Testament you find this same verb used repeatedly. And I'll show you some of its uses because they are so interesting.

Go back to Deuteronomy chapter 31...Deuteronomy chapter 31 and you'll see that this kind of exhortation, though it is unique in the New Testament, is anything but unique in the Old Testament. It is used very often in the Old Testament, this idea of being courageous and being strong.

For example in Deuteronomy chapter 31, Moses obviously is at this particular point in his life going to pass away, pass off the scene. And the mantle of leadership is going to be taken up by Joshua. Joshua will lead the people into the promised land. And in the thirty-first chapter of Deuteronomy, instruction comes from the Lord, comes to the people and most particularly to Joshua. It says you shouldn't be concerned about the enemies. The Lord tells them in verse 3 it is the Lord your God who will cross ahead of you. You don't need to worry, Moses says, God's going to go with you, He's going to be there. So verse 6, "Be strong and courageous," there are those same two verbs, those

same two Greek words from 1 Corinthians 16:13 in the Septuagint translation here, indicating the same sense. Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid...this is the negative side...do not be afraid or tremble at them...here's why...for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you, He will not fail you or forsake you." That was a word from Moses to the people to be strong and courageous.

And then a word from Moses to Joshua, verse 7, Moses called to Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, "Be strong and courageous," same two words, "for you shall go with this people into the land which the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall give it to them as an inheritance. And the Lord is the one who goes ahead of you, He will be with you, He will not fail you or forsake you, do not fear or be dismayed." Here then is God telling the people be strong and courageous, here is Moses telling Joshua be strong and courageous.

Look at 2 Samuel for a moment, or at least listen. In chapter 10 Joab comes before the Israelites. They are on the brink of battle and in verse 9 it says of 2 Samuel 10, "When Joab saw that the battle was set against him in front and in the rear," in other words, he was being attacked from both the front and the back, "he selected from all the choice men of Israel and arrayed them against the Arameans." Now this is the...this is the half time pep talk by the coach, telling him what the battle strategy needs to be. They are surrounded by the enemy. He pulls the leaders in and he fires them up with this confident assertion, pulling these people together, gathering them. Comes down to verse 12 and says this, "Be strong and let us show ourselves courageous for the sake of our people and for the cities of our God and may the Lord do what is good in His sight." Be strong and courageous. What was told to the children of Israel, what Moses told to Joshua, Joab now tells to the battling leaders of the army of Israel...be strong and courageous.

In 1 Kings chapter 2 we find David coming near to the time of death. He describes it as going the way of all the earth. In other words, dying like everybody does. And he calls Solomon his son in and this is what he says to him in 1 Kings 2:2, "Be strong therefore and show yourself a man." Literally, be strong and courageous.

And by the way, you have similar words from David to Solomon in 1 Chronicles 22:11 to 13, they are repeated. There is also a repetition of Moses' words to Joshua later on in that same chapter in Deuteronomy. So this is a very common expression.

How do you do that? Verse 3, 1 Kings 2:3, "Keep the charge of the Lord your God." And what is it? "Walk in His ways, keep His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances and His testimonies." In other words, obey Scripture. Be a man of conviction. Be a man of the Word. Walk in His ways, keeps His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, His testimonies. That is according to what is written in the law of Moses. You do everything that God has revealed and you be strong and courageous, that is uncompromising, unwavering, unintimidated. So, David speaks to Solomon.

And then if you'll look at the...toward the end of 2 Chronicles, thirty-second chapter, you have another occasion where the very same thing is said. This time Hezekiah, the king, is under severe threat from Sennacherib, king of the Assyrians, is coming against the people of God. Hezekiah calls the military officers together in verse 6. This is in 2 Chronicles 32:6, he appointed military officers over the people, gathered them to him in the square at the city gate, spoke encouragingly to them, and this is what he said, "Be strong and courageous, do not fear or be dismayed because of the king of Assyria, nor because of all the multitude which is with him, for the one with us is greater than the one with him. With him...verse 8 says...is only an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles, and the people relied on the words of Hezekiah, king of Judah." And they, by the way, won a victory.

So whether you're having God speaking to the Israelites, Moses to Joshua, Joab to the Israelites, David to Solomon, Hezekiah to his officers, the message is...be strong and courageous...be strong and courageous. Good, sound, basic, spiritual instruction that all believers ought to respond to. In fact, there is a generic exhortation in Psalm 27 verse 14, "Wait for the Lord, be strong and let your heart take courage." Don't give way to fear, don't give way to the enemy, don't give way to intimidation, don't value prestige and popularity and human opinion above truth, stand for what is true. Don't seek the easy way, don't seek the secure place. Don't cave in to the pressure. Be willing to face the difficulty. Be willing to face the challenge, meet the enemy, bear the pain, uphold the right, press to the goal, strong and with great courage.

All of those passages really don't come close to one other text that I think is the richest of all that use this phrase, and that is in Joshua 1, and I want you to go to Joshua 1 for a moment. This will sort of wrap up this introductory feature of setting in place in your mind the importance of this strength.

In Joshua chapter 1, obviously the mantle of leadership has fallen on Joshua. He is going to take them into the land which God has promised to give them. God promises him that He's going to be with him. The Lord tells him, "My servant Moses is now dead but I'm going to be with you and you're going to lead this people." Verse 5 of Joshua 1, "No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life, just as I have been with Moses I will be with you. I will not fail you or forsake you." Verse 6, this is the word of the Lord to Joshua, "Be strong and courageous for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them, only be strong and very courageous. Be careful to do according to all the law which Moses, My servant, commanded. Do not turn from it to the right or to the left so that you may have success wherever you go."

In other words, the idea of being strong and courageous means to live the courage of your convictions which are founded upon the revealed Word of God. In verse 8, "This book of the law, God's law, shall not depart from your mouth. You meditate on it day and night. You are careful to do according to all that is written in it, then you make your way prosperous, then you have success.

Have not I commanded you, be strong and courageous?" On the negative, "Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." Tremendous exhortation for courage and spiritual strength in the face of the worse possible scenario because of the presence of the eternal and almighty and living God. Tremendous.

Verse 5, "God is with you." Verse 6, "The cause is righteous." You just be faithful to be strong and courageous.

The church needs this. Boy, do we need a dose of this in this contemporary time, spiritual strength. And even though it is a command and even though it is mandated to us, and even though we hear all of these passages and we are ennobled because of the model and the example of these who were told to be strong and went forth in strength to conquer, there's another component that we want to understand. And for that I want you to turn to Ephesians chapter 3...Ephesians chapter 3.

This continuing in some introductory comments. But a very important thing to keep in mind at this point. I'm not here to give you some kind of a pep talk. I'm not here to jack you up emotionally. I'm not here to just shout at you these exhortations and hoping that the echo will last a few hours in your mind. There's something much more profound involved in the fulfillment of these exhortations and it's indicated to us in Ephesians chapter 3 and verse 14 where Paul engages himself in a prayer in behalf of the church. And this is what he says, "For this reason...the reason about to be disclosed...for this reason I bow my knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name." I'm praying and I'm praying to the God who is the source of life for everyone. And here's what I'm praying for, here is the reason I am bowing my knees. "In order that God would grant you according to the riches of His glory to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man." And I just want to add this, that while the call to be strong and the call to be courageous is a command, it is a mandate, it is an exhortation, it can only be fulfilled in the wondrous, mysterious power of the indwelling Spirit. We're not talking about just giving pep talks here, we're not talking about just jacking you up emotionally. We're talking about calling you to a Spirit-controlled life, to walking in the energy and the power of the Spirit and being committed to consistent living in line with the convictions that have arisen from an understanding of Scripture. This is being strong.

And it calls for these things that we have outlined. Number one, it calls for a knowledge of the Word of God. Two, a commitment to live according to those truths. Three, to do so in the energy of the Holy Spirit and not in your own human strength.

Now, having said all of that we then approach the passage that I want to draw you to...2 Timothy chapter 2. I think you know what we're talking about now when we talk about spiritual strength. We're talking about someone committed to obedience to the Word of God, someone who has convictions and someone who lives according to those convictions, no matter how difficult it might be because he trusts in the power of the Lord. And someone who does all of this based upon the inner

strength provided by the indwelling Holy Spirit. All right?

But what does it mean? What does it look like? How do you define a strong Christian? I understand that I need to be, I understand that I want to be, I understand that I'm mandated to be, I understand that it's an issue of knowing the Word of God and having the convictions that have risen out of the Word of God, and living uncompromisingly according to those convictions with love, as we saw in 1 Corinthians 16. I understand that it's all energized by the indwelling Spirit, but give me a handle. And I'm glad to do that, and that's exactly what I want to do in 2 Timothy.

Look at 2 Timothy chapter 2 verse 1. As I was thinking about what text again I might draw to, two texts come to mind always in the matter of spiritual strength. This is one that comes to my mind and the other one is in Ephesians 6, and we'll address that one next Sunday. But when you're talking about spiritual strength, you immediately come to the first verse of chapter 2, "You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." This sounds like Moses talking to Joshua. This sounds like David talking to Solomon. This sounds like Joab talking to his officers, or Hezekiah talking to his officers. It's basically the same language. My son, you are facing a battle, be strong in the Lord...be strong for Jesus Christ and all His enabling grace is with you. This is just an echo of those Old Testament exhortations with the addition of the rich reality of the grace that is provided in Christ in the wonder of the New Covenant. It's a call for strength.

But, you know, the Apostle Paul knows more than just trying to give people a sort of a fire-up type pep talk. You know, that might work in athletics. You might be able to get away with that in the locker room, and I've heard some of those in my days in football, I have heard some classics. I have seen the dismantling of locker rooms by coaches trying to fire up teams. And we know that that might last for a few hours, it might jack you up emotionally to go out there and win the battle in that moment. But it has no lasting impact. And I'm not here to give you a pep talk. I'm not here to fire up your emotions and make you react emotionally. And neither was Paul when he told this to Timothy. There was something far more deep in what he was going to say and far more cognitive and far more geared to his understanding than his emotion. And I want to show you what that is as we look at this text.

But let me give you a context. Why does Paul say to Timothy, "You therefore, my son, be strong?" Well there's only one reason he would say that to him and that would be because he hadn't...he wasn't convinced that Timothy was where he needed to be in terms of spiritual strength. Could it be that Timothy was weak at this point? Decidedly so. Go back to chapter 1, let me show you. This book is very familiar to me, hardly a week goes by in my life that I'm not involved in some portions of 2 Timothy. It is a precious, precious book. It has many rich truths to be gained and garnered. And I'm going to share with you a few of them.



But let me give you the sort of the background of this book. When Paul was released from his first imprisonment, he had a first imprisonment from which he was released and some ministry. And then he had a second imprisonment at which time he was executed. And when he was released from his first imprisonment, he called for a rendezvous with Timothy...Timothy being his protege in the faith, Timothy being the one to whom he would pass the mantle, Timothy being the one who could take over the ministry, Timothy knowing the heart of Paul as well as anybody, Timothy was really a mirror reflection, a true disciple of Paul.

So he called on Timothy after he came out of prison to meet him in Ephesus. Ephesus was the church where Paul spent the most time, three years, from that church were founded the other six churches of Asia Minor listed in Revelation 2 and 3, it was a strong church, it was a great church, it was a planting church. And Paul was very concerned about it.

While he had been in prison the word had come to him that the Ephesian church was in a downward spiral. That the leadership had become corrupt. That the people were abandoning their proper duties in the church. That iniquity had come into the church. And there was ungodliness there. And this broke the heart of Paul because this was such a great church with such great beginnings. And so the Apostle Paul established the fact that when he got out of prison he wanted to meet Timothy there and he wanted to see what needed to be done and set that church right. And so that's exactly what happened. Paul met Timothy in Ephesus.

And there were some things that had to happen that Paul had to do himself, some things required apostolic authority. For example, he mentions that when he arrived there he took Hymenaeus and Alexander who were evil men and threw them out of the church. That was something he didn't expect Timothy to have to do, Timothy was a young man, he was young in the faith and he wouldn't have wanted to tackle that. Probably Hymenaeus and Alexander mentioned in 1 Timothy 1 were the leading pastors and they were heretics. They had taught lies and error which had overturned the faith of people and twisted things. And so when Paul got there he kicks out the leading pastor. That's a very serious thing to do in a church. As you know, people get very attached to their leaders, that's very, very traumatic. Paul did it.

Then Paul said, "I'm leaving, I've got to go to Macedonia, you stay and fix the rest of the trouble here." And nobody in their right mind would envy that task, particularly a young man from the outside trying to come in and straighten out a church, a church with all kinds of problems.

One of the things Timothy had to do as indicated in the first letter...by the way, when Paul left he wrote back to Timothy 1 Timothy to instruct him what to do, and so when he got 1 Timothy, it just reinforced what Paul had told him to do. And, of course, when it was read to the church, it gave Timothy more authority in the doing of it. But it called for replacing elders with godly men, replacing deacons and deaconesses with godly men and godly women, it talked about getting men to do what

they're supposed to do and getting women to do what they're supposed to do and setting things right in the church, which is the household of God, the pillar and support of the truth and all of that. It talked about what the leaders were to do, what the people were to do. Very important epistle.

Well as Timothy began to implement it, resistance, resistance, tremendous resistance came. And not only that, but the Romans started to turn up the fire on the persecution end and so there was hostility inside the church and there was persecution outside the church. And life wasn't going very well for Timothy. And he was getting battered on the inside. They were saying he's too young, he's too young, he's too young, what does he know? And Timothy was struggling in his own heart. He was battling with youthful lusts. He tended to be argumentative and fight because he was young and aggressive and he was losing ground and he was wondering, probably in his own mind, if I'm battling lust in my own heart and I'm fighting the battles that young men fight, who am I to be the godly example for the whole church? Life was getting tough. They were saying terrible things about him. He was fearing for his own self-preservation.

As a result, he began to get caught in the down draft of the down spiral of the Ephesian church. And he began to jettison his ministry and he became weakened. You see it in chapter 1, for example, verse 6, Paul has to say to Timothy, and this is sad because he's expecting Timothy to pick up for him when he's gone and this is the last letter Paul ever wrote, so he's just passing the mantle on. But he says to him in verse 5, "I am reminded of the sincere faith within you." I don't question your faith, I don't question your conversion, I know that your faith is real. It first dwelt in your grandmother, Lois, and your mother, Eunice, and I know it's in you as well. I'm not questioning that. "But it's because of that true faith...verse 6...that I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you." What was that gift? The gift for preaching, a gift for evangelizing, doing the work of an evangelist, preaching the gospel, building the church, leading the church. And that gift had been affirmed by the laying on of the hands of this great Apostle and by the hands of the elders of the church. And Timothy was letting that gift fall into disuse. He was so discouraged and so battered, that he was beginning to get weak and he was losing his strength and not using his gift. What a terrible, terrible tragedy.

Paul says, "Stir up that gift, set that thing on fire again. You can't let it fall into coldness and disuse." Why was Timothy doing that? Follow it, verse 7, "God has not given us a spirit of...what?...timidity," that's cowardice. Timothy becoming a coward. Timothy losing heart. Timothy losing his courage. Timothy becoming weakened.

How weak was Timothy? Verse 8, he has to say, "Don't be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord." Don't be ashamed of Jesus Christ, Timothy. Was Timothy so weak that the threat of persecution caused him not to even want to identify with Christ? He was stopping the preaching so people wouldn't threaten his life for preaching and he was stopping even making a personal affirmation of faith. Could it be that those thoughts had entered his mind? Don't be ashamed of me, either, His prisoner. Don't be ashamed to identify me, sure, I'm viewed by many as an enemy of the Roman

Empire and an enemy of Caesar worship, don't be ashamed of me, don't be ashamed of the Lord, don't let your gift fall into disuse, don't be a coward.

Down in verse 13 he even reminds him to hold on to sound doctrine. Could it be that he was vacillating on his doctrine because it was more comfortable? It was safer to back off a little and get out of the heat of the battle in the church and out of the church? Verse 14, he says, "Guard the treasure that's been entrusted to you," and that's the Scripture.

And then chapter 1, it sums up, "You're aware of the fact, aren't you, Timothy, that all who are in Asia turned away from me?" That's one of the most tragic statements ever made by the Apostle Paul. Everybody has turned his back on me. The pressure is too much for everybody. They've all caved in. And he names, Phygelus and Hermogenes, and that must have been a shock because whoever these two guys were, they must at one point in time been stalwarts and they caved in and then Paul is saying to Timothy...Don't...don't get in the list with them, please, please. That's...that's the scenario around this epistle.

Timothy is getting caught in the down draft as the church begins to spiral into weakness. And that's why chapter 2 starts this way, "You therefore, my son, be strong." Paul is calling for strong leadership. A man who is not ashamed of Christ, a man who is not ashamed to be identified with others who are being persecuted, a man who is using his gift to the max, consistently resolutely, with great energy and great power, a man who is not timid or fearful or cowardly, but is bold and courageous, a man who will not waver and will not equivocate on strong doctrinal conviction, that's what he wants out of Timothy.

And it's even going to be more important soon than it's every been because Paul is going to pass off the scene and Timothy is going to have to be the model for others to follow.

Now the question is...what does it mean to be strong? That's the question. Be strong. Well what does that mean? Show me what you mean?

Well Paul is the master teacher, he learned well from his Lord and he learned that you have to translate that into something people can get their hands on. And so as Jesus often taught in parables, and as all good teachers teach in analogies and make pictures so that you can grasp easier, Paul does that. And he's going to give a series of pictures of what a strong Christian looks like here. And when you see these pictures, you will understand. And he's speaking to your mind. He's speaking to your mind, your reason, your cognition, your thought process, not just trying to jack up your emotions for some kind of temporary fix. He wants you to understand what a strong Christian is. If you're going to be strong and courageous, there are some things you must understand.

First of all, verse 2, you must be a teacher. Then verse 3 and 4, you must be a soldier. Then verse 5, you must be an athlete. And then verse 6, you must be a farmer. And he starts with those four images. And if you understand those images, and you see what he says about those images, the picture of the strong Christian becomes very, very clear.

Let's start into that and we'll take the first one this morning and the other ones tonight. In some ways, the best is to come tonight. But look at verse 2, let's take the first picture. If you want to understand what it means to be strong, to build your life resolutely on the Word of God, on convictions, on waveringly uncompromisingly to stand for those convictions and to do so in the energy of the Holy Spirit, if you want to be that strong believer, first of all, you must view yourself and take on the role of a teacher. Verse 2, "And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." The main verb here really is to teach. Paul says I taught you, you need to teach others who can teach others. You've got four generations, Paul to Timothy to faithful men to others also.

He is saying, "Timothy, you are a teacher. You must pass on truth. Absolutely crucial." Let me tell you something about teaching. Teaching builds your understanding of Scripture and it builds your base of conviction. Why? First of all, because in order to teach the Word of God, you have to study it. And you will never study the Word of God with the same level of devotion and diligence if you don't teach that you will if you have to teach.

People say to me, "You spend so much time in the Scripture. How do you discipline yourself to do that?" It's easy, you come here every Sunday, you show up and I show up and I need to be ready. I remember when I was teaching a course in ecclesiology and eschatology in seminary a number of years ago, I gave an assignment at the beginning of the semester, and I said to the men in the class, I said, "That assignment will be due on a certain day," and I told them that was the day the assignment would be due. And the day came and I asked them if they would turn in the assignment. It was like a month so they had plenty of time to prepare for it. And there were three or four men who came to me and said, "You know, you just got to know we had this problem and that problem and would it be okay if we turned it in next class?" And I said no, I said that won't be okay, you'll just have to take zero. And they said, "But...but...but...you didn't say anything more about it after the first announcement and then there was one another announcement."

I said, "Was it the fact that you didn't know it would be today?"

"No, we knew, we just didn't know that there wouldn't be any grace."

I said, "Well look, I don't know what you'll learn out of this class, but if you only learn one lesson, it might be real helpful, and that's this lesson, that you have to have your sermon on Sunday, not Tuesday." I've had some of those young men come back and tell me in later years it was the best

lesson they ever learned.

I had a professor in seminary who told me he could never be a pastor of a church because he couldn't make his mind up about every passage by Sunday every week. That's one of the things you sort of have to do.

One of the great pressures of teaching is you better learn before you teach. And so the advantage of teaching is that you have to learn it before you can teach it. So that's the first benefit. The second is, you're exposed to the truth to a point of clarification. In other words, it's not like your daily devotional, you just read through it and if you get it, you get it. If you don't, you don't. You better understand it because you've got to open your mouth and explain it.

So the second benefit of teaching...the first benefit is it forces you into the Word of God, the second thing, it forces you to clarity...it forces you to clarity, because if you're teaching someone and you don't understand what you're talking about, they won't either. And you know what? They'll say, "I don't understand." And then you'll say, "Well....a...maybe it's too deep." Look, if you don't understand, it's not too deep, it's too shallow. It's very easy to be hard to understand, just don't know what you're talking about and nobody will understand. It's very hard to be clear, you have to know what you're talking about.

So the advantage of teaching is it forces you to clarity, it forces you to precision, it forces you to understand it. Thirdly, it forces you to convictions. In other words, you've got to come up with whatever's important and you've got to articulate that and that is really effectively and efficiently how you build your base of conviction. You expose yourself to the Word of God, the pressure of teaching forces you to do that. You force yourself to clarity and you force yourself to conviction. And then there's one other tremendous benefit. You put yourself in a position of accountability because when you teach someone you have publicly declared the importance of what you've just said, you have said this is my conviction and I'm passing it on to you because of its importance. You have proven that you understand it, you understand it well enough to teach it, and you believe it's important enough to pass it on. And you're going to hold them to it. And what does that say about what it does in your life? You have just made yourself accountable to your student. That's healthy.

You see the benefit of teaching. You say, "Well I don't know, pastor, I can't preach and I can't teach a church, or Sunday...I just don't have that gift." Find somebody who knows less than you, anybody, just...I'm sure there's someone somewhere who knows less than you and tell them what you know, disciple someone. Start in your family. Do it with a new Christian, do it with a friend. Put yourself in a position to pass on truth. Friends, you're not a cul de sac. You aren't the end of the tracks. It's not over when it gets to you. This isn't the end. You can't say, "Well, I've got it, I'm ready for heaven." It's not over, folks, somebody gave it to you, now what are you supposed to do? Give it to somebody else. And what you give away you keep.

The reason that one comes to understand the Word of God is because you're constantly teaching it. I remember what I teach. I know what I believe because I've reinforced it so much in the crucible of study and clarifying it in my mind and coming to a conviction and passionately presenting it to you, and doing that repeatedly until I own the stuff I give away. That becomes the fabric of my life, and that's the substance of my strength. My convictions are all formed in preparing to teach. The strength of my doctrine and my commitment to it is forged in preparing to teach. And then once I've taught, I am accountable. I'm held accountable by you. Listen, everybody holds me accountable. If I deviate one step that people don't understand and think it's consistent with me, I get letters, phone calls E-mail, faxes. I got two this morning. "Why did you do this? This doesn't seem consistent with..." That's fine, I need that. I don't want to equivocate.

But, you see, teaching has that effect. And you need to pass it on. Paul says I taught you, Timothy, you find some faithful men who are able to teach others also so they can pass it on. That's just part and parcel of moving into the next generation of the faithful. It's tremendous, you know, when you do that, you do that, first of all, in your own family. I love to see my children start to give me back my convictions as if they discovered and I didn't know them. You know that? The other day...the other day, it was Melinda, she says, "Dad, come in here."

And I said, "Okay, hon, what is it?"

She says, "Dad, have you seen this verse?" And she opens up her Bible and she says, "Dad, look what this says?" And she said, "Dad, do you understand the implications of that?"

I said, "Is this an echo? Have I given this speech in here before in this same kitchen that's bouncing around?" I said, "I think I understand the implications."

"Well," she said, "I hope so because this is serious."

And I'm just smiling, you know. Now she's holding me to the convictions I gave her she thinks she discovered on her own. She's in the first service, so she doesn't know I said that. I mean, it's very encouraging. My own children hold me accountable. I told somebody not long ago that my wife actually expects me to live everything I preach. Is that ridiculous? It's not, it's just impossible, all the time. She's gracious, so that's good.

Anyway, we're called to this responsibility of teaching. I look back on the teachers I had, I look back and see my father who to this day, I tell you, he's relentless. He's absolutely relentless, indefatigable, irrepressible teacher and that means he's an irrepressible, indefatigable learner. I got a FAX from him and he says, "I'm sending you a book, I've marked the chapters with little Post-Its, I want you to read those chapters and write me a critique right away, it's a view that I've never discussed and I

really want to know what you think about it. I'll be waiting."

In the mail I get this book and I have sit down and write some critiques on these deals and send them back to him. He's eighty-two years old and he cannot stop learning and teaching and he's forcing me into the same thing. Obviously he has all my life and it's just...it's just the way you continue to refine the truth in your heart by teaching. He's always wanting to teach me and understand so he can teach others. And what a great legacy that is. I went away to seminary, Dr. Fineberg did the same thing and so many of my mentors and teachers have done that through the years. They taught me so I could teach others also, and that's the way it is with all of us. See yourself as a teacher.

Strong Christians are made in the crucible of discipline d study which is usually going to occur when someone has a responsibility to pass the information on to somebody. It doesn't mean you have to have the gift of teaching or preaching or whatever, it just means you have to recognize the responsibility of passing the truth on so that people can understand it. That's how you build your own convictions.

Well, we'll leave the others for tonight, the soldier, the athlete and the farmer. Let's pray.

Father, again our thanks for the \*grace which You've granted to us in Christ that has allowed us to be strengthened by Your Spirit in the inner man. We thank You for the gift of the Holy Spirit upon whom receiving we have received power. We thank You that we have the power and the insight to the Word of God to allow us to grasp its meaning, the power from the Spirit to form convictions, the power from the Spirit to obey those truths and to walk in them. And even the power to pass them on. Lord, we want to be faithful, we want a strong church. We want to be strong and courageous and all the battles against the world outside, against weak and compromising Christians inside, against all the assaults on our comfort and on our reputation. We want to be faithful to the truth as we are reminded again by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 16, "At the same time never forsaking love, always in a loving manner." But not equivocating on the truth. Give us strength, Lord, Your body needs strength to stand firm for You and for the truth. And we pray to that end for the glory of our Savior. Amen.

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