Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Elements of a Strong Spiritual Life, Part 1
Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:1-2
Code: 55-5

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Situation Then

Timothy was the apostle Paul's son in the faith and a leader in the church at Ephesus. Paul founded that church (Acts 19) but by the time he wrote his second epistle to Timothy the church and its leaders were characterized by doctrinal error and sinful behavior.

Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus to rectify the problems in that church. First Timothy contains Paul's instructions to Timothy on how to set the Ephesian church in order. Second Timothy was written to encourage Timothy to "be strong" (2 Tim. 2:1) at a time when he was apparently experiencing a lack of resolve in performing his duties.

Second Timothy is the last letter Paul wrote. It was written shortly before he gave his life in the cause of Christ. He wanted to pass the baton of spiritual leadership to Timothy, and he didn't want Timothy to accept it in a weak state. The church was experiencing persecution in Rome, many wouldn't accept the instructions Timothy received from Paul, and Timothy was confronted by sophisticated philosophical opposition. Paul knew Timothy was young and apparently of timid disposition. In the face of such circumstances he required strength of will.

In 2 Timothy 2:1-7 Paul says, "You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 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. Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. And also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything."

B. The Situation Now

Several years ago I read a news account about two children discovered in an attic. They had been chained to their beds since birth and were teenagers when finally discovered. They were

malnourished and animalistic in behavior. Their confinement had allowed all the worst traits of human behavior to flourish. As I read that report I thought of the church and how in many cases it too is malnourished and allows behavior among its members so much more like the animalistic behavior of the world than the righteous standard it has been called to.

During the summer I often visit various places around the country. Often I hear people say, "There aren't any churches in our city where the Word of God is preached with power." I am often asked, "Do you know of any good churches in a certain area?" On reflection many times I am forced to admit I can't think of any.

Our age seems to have many popular preachers and many popular churches, but few seem to have any power. Though Christianity is popular, the church as a whole is weak. Many Christians seek psychological answers for their personal difficulties because they do not understand their spiritual resources and how to apply them. Some are lured into sin and then try to excuse it. Others are unable to recognize sound doctrine or are unwilling to defend it.

Weak leadership is responsible for the present state of the church. The prophet Hosea said, "Like people, like priests" (Hos. 4:9, NIV). Weak leaders may produce churches that are active but powerless. In many churches there is talk about Christianity but little conviction, preaching against sin but little confrontation, and strong doctrinal affirmation but much compromise. Paul's exhortations to Timothy are as needed today as they were in Timothy's day.

C. The Solution Required

My greatest desire is not that I would be a popular speaker but a powerful one. I want the strength of God evident in my life so that God can use me in a powerful way through His Word and Spirit. That's to be the goal of every Christian. Victory in the Christian life belongs to the strong--not the weak.

Paul affirmed to Timothy the need for strength in the ministry. Timothy was weak and vacillating, and needed to be reminded to "kindle afresh" the gift that was in him (2 Tim. 1:6). He needed to be reminded that God had not given him "a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline" (v. 7), and that suffering was part of the ministry (v. 8). Timothy had a duty to perform and needed to be reminded of his resources in Christ.

Paul's solution to Timothy's problem was to exhort him to be strong. But if Paul had stopped with that advice he would have frustrated Timothy--and us as well. If you're like me, you've probably heard many exhortations to be strong, but didn't have the faintest idea how. I remember as a child hearing various speakers exhort me to dedication, consecration, and devotedness to Christ, and never knew what to do. So I'd be like the proverbial man who jumped on a horse and rode off madly in all

directions--trying lots of things without success. Paul illustrated his exhortation with four different pictures: a teacher, a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer (2 Tim. 2:2-6). They illustrate how we are to be strong in Christ.

Lesson

II. THE EXHORTATION (v. 1)

"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

"You therefore" points to Paul's previous admonitions to Timothy not to be ashamed (e.g., 1:8, 12, 16). He had just called Timothy to identify with the behavior of Onesiphorus, who had been faithful to Paul during his imprisonment in Rome (1:16-18). Here he issues a command to Timothy to be strong--a command that was tempered with love.

Paul's words "my son" reflect God's way of dealing with His children. God's commands are given with reminders of His love for us. Timothy was Paul's son in the faith, and Paul had poured his life into Timothy over many years. Paul's exhortation to Timothy reflects the tenderness and love that ought to exist between those in spiritual authority and those they lead.

God is sovereign, yet He requires men in spiritual leadership to preserve, guard, and pass on the truth of the gospel. That responsibility required that Timothy be reminded of his spiritual resources and encouraged to be strong in the face of his responsibilities.

A. The Strength Required

Timothy was to "be strong" (v. 1). That translates the Greek verb endunamo[ma]o, which is stated as a present passive imperative and could be translated "keep on being empowered." The connotation is similar to Ephesians 6:10: "Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might." Timothy was not to be strong in his own strength but in God's. He was to receive God's power and allow it to flow through him.

Jude 21 says, "Keep yourselves in the love of God." Jude meant that his readers were to keep themselves in the place where God's love and blessing could be received. We do that by being obedient to Him and taking advantage of the means of grace available to us--the study of God's Word, prayer, fasting, and meditation. That's how we place ourselves to receive His power.

B. The Grace Received

Perhaps the best translation of 2 Timothy 2:1 is, "Be strong by means of the grace that is in Christ Jesus." As believers we exist in the sphere of grace through our union with Christ. It's the grace of God that empowers believers.

We are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8). Grace is the undeserved favor of God extended through the gift of salvation--it can't be earned. Once grace is extended to us it's always ours. That's important because if God withdrew His grace, our present sins would condemn us. By living in the sphere of Grace we are continually cleansed of our sins (1 John 1:9).

God's grace extends to us not only forgiveness, but also divine power. Romans 5:2 speaks of "this grace in which we stand." The Greek word translated "stand" (hist[ma]emi) means "to be fixed." It is by God's grace that we are both forgiven and have the power to stand in the sphere of grace.

It's God's grace that enables us to serve God--otherwise we could do nothing. God's will is accomplished "'not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). That's particularly the kind of grace Paul spoke of in 2 Timothy 2:1.

III. THE ILLUSTRATIONS (vv. 2-6)

Paul drew four pictures to help Timothy understand how to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (v. 1). Like the parabolic teaching of Christ, they serve as vivid illustrations of spiritual truth.

A. A Teacher (v. 2)

"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."

Paul wanted Timothy to view himself as a teacher. Verse 2 pictures teachers teaching prospective teachers. Paul wanted Timothy to pass on what he had learned to "faithful men" who would become teachers. They in turn would teach others, and the line of teaching would continue.

The True Apostolic Succession

The true Apostolic Succession was not of office but of doctrine. Jesus taught the twelve apostles, they taught the next generation of teachers, and that chain of doctrinal truth has continued down to today. As Christians we are a part of a living chain of doctrinal truth that reaches back to Christ Himself. In Acts 1:1 Luke wrote that the first account he composed (the gospel of Luke) was "about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (emphasis added). Though He finished the work of redemption, Jesus only began the work of teaching and preaching the truth of the gospel. That work must

continue to go on as an indestructible chain.

An Unbroken Chain

At home I have a painting of my great grandfather in his ecclesiastical robes. That's what he wore when He preached God's Word in Scotland. My grandfather was also a preacher, as well as my father, who preached God's Word to me. So to me that painting is a picture of the chain that stretches all the way back to Jesus Christ. The chain is unbroken because it represents the teaching of Christ preserved in the Word of God that's been passed all the way down to you and me.

1. Teachers are part of a process

In verse 2 Paul reminds Timothy that he is a part of a process. I remember participating in a mile relay race while in college. Our first runner ran a great leg and passed the baton to me. I ran as hard as I could and when I handed the baton to the third man, we were tied for first place. We thought we might win because both our third and fourth runners were especially fast. After receiving the baton our third man ran around the curve, started down the back stretch, then stopped. He walked off the track and sat down.

We all thought he injured himself and ran over to find out what happened. I'll never forget his reply when we asked what was wrong: "I don't know--I just don't feel like running today." We couldn't believe it! Like Timothy, that runner was a part of a process. He didn't have the right to stop when others were counting on him and striving with him. Paul didn't want Timothy to be the broken link in the chain of preaching the gospel of Christ.

2. Teachers are entrusted with the truth

The phrase "the things which you have heard from me" refers to the doctrine Paul had taught Timothy. Paul had entrusted Timothy with revelation from God. He expected Timothy to entrust that same teaching to others.

The verb translated "entrust" (Gk., paratith[ma]emi) means "to deposit for safekeeping." Paul was referring to the deposit of revelation he had left with Timothy. He spoke of the same thing elsewhere.

a) 2 Timothy 1:12-14

"I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day. Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith

and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you." Paul had entrusted his life to God. Timothy was to guard what had been entrusted to him--God's Word.

b) 1 Timothy 6:20

"Guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called 'knowledge.'" Guarding the "sound words" (2 Tim. 1:13) of God meant avoiding empty words.

A better translation of the phrase "in the presence of many witnesses" (2 Tim. 2:2) is "supported by the confirming testimony of many witnesses." Paul wasn't referring to an ordination ceremony involving a charge to Timothy witnessed by many. Rather, Paul desired Timothy to remember that the deposit of revelation he had from Paul had been confirmed by many witnesses to be of divine origin. Paul was often accompanied by many teachers (e.g., Acts 20:4) and he was one of five who ministered at Antioch (Acts 13:1). The apostle Peter attested that Paul's writings were Scripture by Peter (2 Pet. 3:15-16).

Beyond the importance of guarding the truth is the responsibility every spiritual leader has to give it away. He needs to guard its purity and pass it on to others in that pure form. "These" in 2 Timothy 2:2 refers to the truth entrusted to Timothy that he was to "entrust to faithful men."

The Primary Role of a Man of God

The primary role of a man of God is to maintain the purity of the Word and pass it on to the next generation intact. That's the reason The Master's Seminary was formed. I feel I must do all I can to raise up godly leadership for the next generation of the church. If the church is weak, it's because of weak leaders. The goal of the seminary is to build strong leaders to build a strong church. I can't rely on others to do that job--it's my responsibility as much as anyone's. That's also the reason for The Master's College. I hope those two institutions will produce a generation of people who hold to the truth of God in its purity. They exist as two means of guarding the truth that has been entrusted to us as believers.

Romans 3:2 says a chief advantage the Jewish people had was being "entrusted with the oracles of God." Timothy had also been entrusted with revelation and it was essential that he pass it on so he could join Paul in Rome for the apostle's final hours (cf. 2 Tim. 4:9). I have a compulsion to pass on what had been entrusted to me. That's why I write books and commentaries on the Bible. All the ministries I am involved in--whether preaching or generating tapes and a radio broadcast--are geared toward my primary role of passing on the truth in its purity to the next generation.

3. Teachers must be selective

The truth is to be passed on to "faithful men ... able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). Later Paul instructed Timothy to "preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2) in a general sense to all, but here Paul was concerned that Timothy be selective in his training of future preachers and teachers.

I can relate to that. During the many years of my ministry I've concentrated on two priorities: preaching the Word to all, and building godly leaders. Building godly leaders requires that I be selective--you can't minister to everyone on a one-on-one basis. So I seek to find men I can invest my life in.

a) In choosing faithful men

Verse 2 says those men are to be faithful men--men of proven spiritual character. The Greek word here translated "faithful" is translated "trustworthy" in verse 11. If I am going to invest my life in a man I don't want him to turn out like Phygelus, Hermogenes, or Demas (2 Tim. 1:15; 4:10)--men who would forsake me because of love for the world. The kind of men I want to spend my life discipling are loyal to the Word of God and dedicated to preserving its truth.

Many spend large amounts of time with problem-plagued people who aren't faithful. Certainly those people need much love and tenderness, but unless they become faithful, they will never make a difference for Christ. While I never desire to be insensitive to others, I do want to pour myself into those who will make a difference--those who will be faithful to guard and articulate the truth.

b) In choosing gifted men

Verse 2 indicates that the men I should invest my time in are those "who will be able to teach others also." Paul wanted Timothy to be a teacher-maker, and that's what I want to be. Beyond the issue of character is the issue of giftedness. I have the gift of teaching and it's that gift I seek to develop in others with the same gift.

I remember after counseling a man in our church several times he told me, "I don't know if it helps you or not, but I don't think you have the gift of counseling." I took that as an opportunity to focus myself. I don't try to teach others how to do things I can't do. Instead I try to teach and encourage others with gifts similar to my own, which is what God would have us all do.

Conclusion

Every pastor is to model what those in the church are to be. In the present instance that means other pastors and I are to model what it means to preserve and pass on the truth of the gospel. That's because every Christian is to be part of that process--perhaps at different levels and in different ways, but with the same goal. Peter said "always to be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Pet. 3:15, NIV). Each of us is to be diligent to present ourselves "approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

First Timothy 5:17 says, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." The Lord honors those who are faithful to guard the truth and pass it on in its purity. We need to be part of the process of teaching wherever we are--either by teaching or being taught.

Why Teach?

What we teach we retain. When I read a book without doing anything with its contents, I generally soon forget what it was about. But when I pull out its principles and teach them to others, I never forget it. We all ought to learn to teach. Husbands ought to teach their wives and wives can teach their husbands--if you've learned spiritual truth during the day, tell each other! Parents ought to teach their children, and children who are learning God's Word ought to share it with their parents, friends, and classmates. We can all share spiritual truth at work and with fellow believers in times of prayer and study. When you write letters, share what you have been learning. Get a group of young people or young Christians together and teach them.

The point is this: pass on God's truth in its pure form to the next generation. Our world is falling apart morally and spiritually, and the only thing that gives people a gauge to measure reality is the plumbline of God's Word. To pass on the truth successfully we must be committed to knowing it and teaching it to others.

Anyone who wants to be a strong believer must see himself as a teacher. That means being willing to do a number of things.

A. Be a Diligent Student of the Truth

If you want to be a teacher you must first diligently study what you will teach (2 Tim. 2:15).

B. Clearly Articulate the Truth

A teacher of the truth must be clear. That's necessary if others are going to understand your hope in Christ (1 Pet. 3:15) and "the things which are fitting for sound doctrine" (Tit. 2:1).

C. Be Loyal to the Truth

A teacher of the truth must be loyal to it. If you want to be blessed and empowered by God, you must live in accordance with His Word. A teacher is willing to fight for the truth, and that presupposes living by it. Once the truth is part of your life, fighting for it is natural.

D. Be Continually Teaching the Truth

Teachers of the truth must continually be involved in the process of equipping others. Like a relay race, those who teach God's Word must be prepared to receive, run with, and pass on the baton of the pure truth of God.

Our Lord wants strong believers who are empowered by Him. That means being a teacher entrusted with the truth and faithful to pass it on.

Focusing on the Facts

1. When Paul wrote his second epistle to Timothy, what were the church in Ephesus and its leaders characterized by.

2. Why did Paul send to Ephesus? What did he write about in his two letters to Timothy?

3. Describe what characterizes the church in our age. What is responsible for that situation?

4. What was Paul's solution to Timothy's problem? What illustrations did he use?

5. What did Timothy's responsibilities require that he be reminded of?

6. What does the Greek verb translated "be strong" in 2 Timothy 2:2 imply about where our strength comes from?

7. How does God's grace operate in the lives of believers?

8. How did Paul want Timothy to view himself?

9. Explain the true Apostolic Succession.

10. What does the Greek verb translated "entrust" literally mean? What had Timothy been entrusted with? What was he expected to do with it?

11. How might the phrase "in the presence of many witnesses" be better translated? Why?

12. In what sense are teachers in the church to be selective? Describe the character and ability of those teachers in the church are to select?

13. What are we all to do with our gifts?

14. Describe the different ways we can teach those we regularly come into contact with.

15. Summarize what a teacher in the church must be willing to do.

Pondering the Principles

1. One wonders whether Timothy had forgotten the meaning of grace, judging from Paul's exhortation in 2 Timothy 2:1--something we are all prone to do. At times does it seem you have no power and are faced with overwhelming problems? Do you ever feel like God's grace is withdrawn from you? The Puritan Thomas Goodwin observed that God's grace is "absolute, unchangeable, irreversible, where it is once pitched. If I in seeking God can find this grace of God to own me and embrace me while I seek it, then what do I come to? To a state of irreversible grace, of grace that will carry on the work, that will undertake all for me, that is faithful, and will do it" (The Works of Thomas Goodwin, vol. 8 [Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985 reprint], p. 197). As a Christian, take comfort that God has extended His grace to you and that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39).

2. The process of teaching can be likened to the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep: the shepherd is responsible to feed and the sheep must have food. The American pastor Charles Jefferson wrote, "When the minister goes into the pulpit, he is the shepherd in the act of feeding, and if every minister had borne this in mind, many a sermon would have been other than it has been. The curse of the pulpit is the superstition that a sermon is a work of art and not a piece of bread or meat" (The Minister as Shepherd [Hong Kong: Living Books for All, 1973], p. 61). Is whatever teaching you do--your study, preparation, and speaking--done wholly with the spiritual hunger of God's sheep in mind?

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