

05. 2 Timothy 2:1 – 3:9



2 Timothy 2:1-2

You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in the Messiah Jesus; and what you have heard from me supported by many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well.

Paul continues the theme of fidelity to authentic teaching, and the need for courage to persevere in the face of suffering (see 1:6-14). The strength is not Timothy's own but is the strength of Jesus given him when he was commissioned for his ministry (see 1:6-7).

Christianity is not a philosophy of life thought out by Paul and handed on to his pupils in the fashion of the philosophical schools of his day. It is based on events (see 2:8), and the teaching is about the meaning of these events as seen in the light of faith. It is teaching based on the gospel. Paul therefore does not appeal only to his own teaching, but to ‘**many witnesses**’. The truth of the teaching which Paul gave Timothy is supported by the Christian lives lived by those who have believed in the gospel and lived accordingly.

2 Timothy 2:3-5

Share in suffering like a good soldier of the Messiah Jesus. No one serving in the army gets entangled in everyday affairs; the soldier's aim is to please the enlisting officer. And in the case of an athlete, no one is crowned without competing according to the rules.

A professional soldier has to commit himself to the task whatever its difficulty. He has an oath of allegiance to ‘**the enlisting officer**’. Timothy has committed his life to the service of Jesus. An athlete, too, has to live a disciplined life, and he must ‘**compete according to the rules**’. Timothy must live the gospel as, with Paul: ‘forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in the Messiah Jesus’ (Philippians 3:13-14).

2 Timothy 2:6-7

It is the farmer who does the work who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in all things.

Like a farmer, Timothy should expect to work hard if he is to enjoy the harvest.

2 Timothy 2:8-10

Remember Jesus the Messiah, raised from the dead, a descendant of David – that is my gospel, for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in the Messiah Jesus, with eternal glory.

The focus of the gospel is on Jesus in whom the promises made to David are fulfilled (see Romans 1:3), Jesus the Messiah, raised from the dead. Paul's suffering is part of the saving work of Jesus (see 1:8). We recall Paul's words: 'Even if I am to be poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you' (Philippians 2:17).

They can crucify Jesus, but they cannot take away his life. They can chain Paul, but they cannot hinder the saving power of the gospel of God's love. Jesus endured, and God brought him through death to the communion of the risen life. Paul is determined to endure whatever happens to him in the course of the gospel. The Risen Jesus has sent him on a mission and he does not want to hold back from being an instrument for all those whom Jesus wishes to reach through him, all those whom God wills to grace through him with the gift of salvation and eternal glory.

2 Timothy 2:11-13

The saying is sure: 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 will also deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself.

Paul seems to be quoting from a catechetical formula. Verse eleven repeats what Paul wrote to the Romans: ‘if we have died with the Messiah, we believe that we will also live with him’ (Romans 6:8). This is true now: ‘I have been crucified with the Messiah; and it is no longer I who live. It is the Messiah who lives in me’ (Galatians 2:19-20). Its full truth awaits ‘eternal glory’. In verse twelve, Paul focuses on the endurance needed to be faithful to the commitment to give one’s life to carrying on the mission of Jesus: ‘He died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them’ (2 Corinthians 5:15).

If we choose to reject the love offered us by Jesus, he has no choice but to respect our decision: ‘whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God’ (Luke 12:9). If having denied him we repent, as Peter did, we will certainly find his love welcoming us back (Luke 22:61-62).

It is this point that is emphasised in the final verse. God is love. We cannot change that, and God will never revoke love, ‘for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable’ (Romans 11:29).

2 Timothy 2:14-17

Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth. Avoid profane chatter, for it will lead people further away from true religion, and their talk will spread like gangrene.

From ‘**explaining the word of truth**’, we cannot be side-tracked into clever disputes which are concerned not with seeking the truth but with victory in debate. Timothy and those to whom Timothy is to entrust the teaching of the gospel are to avoid this. It causes people to go not towards wisdom but ‘**further away from true religion**’ towards ἀσεβεία, a disregard for God which is recognised as the source of all sinful behaviour. This is developed in Paul’s First Letter to Timothy.

The deposit of faith is not a dead letter to be locked away so as not to be lost. It is a living word that guides us in our journey towards God and in our mission to the world. Paul calls his readers to ‘walk in newness of life’ (Romans 6:4). This can be done only when the teaching that guides us is on ‘**God’s firm foundation**’ (2:19).

2 Timothy 2:18

Hymenaeus and Philetus have swerved from the truth by claiming that the resurrection has already taken place. They are upsetting the faith of some.

Paul wrote to the Colossians: ‘You have come to fullness in him ... When you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead’ (Colossians 2:10,12).

However, Paul never ceased longing for the fullness of the risen life which lies beyond death, when we will enjoy unending communion with him who is the ‘first-born from the dead’ (Colossians 1:18), ‘our hope of glory’ (Colossians 1:27). There is still much to be done, and so Paul exhorts the Colossians: ‘If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above ... When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory’ (Colossians 3:1,4).

2 Timothy 2:19

But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who calls on the name of the Lord turn away from wickedness."

The first quotation is from the Greek Version of Numbers 16:5. It reminds us of the words of Jesus; 'I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me' (John 10:14). God knows his own and will care for them, but we must resist iniquity.

The second quotation draws out the implications of Leviticus 24:16 which is a warning to those who blaspheme God's name. Paul is using it to urge repentance on those who teach error in God's name.

2 Timothy 2:20-21

In a large house there are utensils not only of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for special use, some for ordinary. All who cleanse themselves of the things I have mentioned will become special utensils, dedicated and useful to the owner of the house, ready for every good work.

Each of us is precious in God's sight: 'we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life' (Ephesians 2:10). If we have allowed ourselves to be corrupted, we must allow God to purify us, so as to be 'ready for every good work'.

2 Timothy 2:22-23

Shun 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 stupid and senseless controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.

The word ‘passion’ (ἐπιθυμία) is quite common in Paul. Strong feelings, of course, can be good, as for example when Paul expresses his passionate longing to ‘depart and be with Christ’ (Philippians 1:23). When passions are misdirected, however, they can be a vice, as when Paul exhorts the Romans: ‘Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires’ (Romans 13:4). In context the ‘youthful passions’ that Timothy is to avoid include the immature assurance that one is right and the consequent readiness to argue. A desire for novelty may also be included. Paul is calling him to wisdom.

2 Timothy 2:24-26

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, patient, correcting opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth, and that they may escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

Timothy is ‘**the Lord's servant**’. He must do the will of the Lord in the Lord's way. He must also, like the suffering servant of the Lord, not be discouraged by suffering. Modelling himself on Christ, or rather letting Christ live in him, he is to be ‘**kindly**’ (ἥπιος). We recall Paul's words to the Thessalonians: ‘Though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle (ἥπιος) among you, like a mother tenderly caring for her own children’ (1 Thessalonians 2:7).

He is to be ‘an apt teacher correcting opponents with gentleness’ (πραΰτης). When Paul himself had need to correct the Corinthians, he wrote: ‘Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness’ (1Corinthians 4:21), and in his second letter, he appealed to them by what is there translated ‘the meekness of Christ’ (2 Corinthians 10:1). This is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). Timothy is to do everything he can, through good teaching, to bring about the conversion of those who have been caught in the snare of evil.

2 Timothy 2:25

God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth

God's correction is always in view of repentance. Religious knowledge is a gift. When correcting error, we must do so in such a way as to attract the person in error to Jesus who longs for that person to 'come to know the truth' (see 1 Timothy 2:4). The following prayer of Jesus is meant for all, including those who, in their teaching, are deceived and are deceiving others. For the prayer to be fulfilled, repentance – a profound change of mind and heart – is necessary. The Christian leader, acting in accordance with the will of his lord, must do everything to make this possible, while in no way compromising the truth of the gospel.

‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy [fits easily], and my burden is light’ (Matthew 11:25-30).

Repentance means that we ‘change and become like children’ (Matthew 18:3). Only Christ’s love, revealing the Father, can attract us to such a change. The Christian leader is called to offer correction in this spirit.

2 Timothy 3:1

You must understand this, that in the last days distressing times will come.

In expecting the powers of darkness to put up a desperate effort before being finally vanquished ‘**in the last days**’, Paul witnesses to the apocalyptic view common among his contemporaries. Already in his second letter to the Thessalonians he wrote: ‘Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction ... Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you? ... For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work ... and every kind of wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved’ (2 Thessalonians 2:4-II).

This is consistent with the tradition found also in the synoptic gospels. In Luke, for example, we hear Jesus say: Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven. But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name' (Luke 21:10-12).

We find the following statement in the first letter of John: 'As you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. From this we know that it is the last hour' (1 John 2:18).

2 Timothy 3:2-5

People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, brutes, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid them!

Paul has already mentioned that ‘all who are in Asia have turned away from me’ (1:15), and he has been urging Timothy to protect himself against the influence of those who are expounding erroneous teaching (2:16-18, 23-26). He now focuses directly on these teachers, seeing them as part of the ‘distressing times’ (3:1). Timothy is to expect this, but he is also to know that they will ultimately fail.

We should not miss the pain that lies behind these verses. Paul is not describing the world. He is lamenting the sinfulness that Timothy will find in the church, among those who break faith, or, as he says in the final verse, who ‘**hold to the outward form of religion but deny its power**’. They have been baptised into the church, but have resisted the power of Jesus’ Spirit to transform their lives into lives of holiness.

Paul’s picture is purposely black. The tragedy is that he and Timothy can already see within the Christian community elements of what is described here. Such people, if they refuse to repent, are to be ‘**avoided**’ (kept out of the congregation) lest their corruption ‘**spread like gangrene**’ (2:17).

People will be self-centred (**‘lovers of themselves’**), rather than centring their lives on God and on others. They will be **‘unholy’**, having no respect for the sacred, and so they will be closed to God and to others, their lives wholly occupied with their own desires.

Some of the vices listed here can be found also in the only longer list of vices in Paul’s writings in his letter to the Romans. **‘Boasters’**, **‘arrogant’**, and **‘disobedient to parents’** are listed together also in Romans 1:30, where they are also followed by **‘inhuman’** (Romans 1:31).

In the opening address of his letter to Titus, Paul speaks of himself as ‘a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus the Messiah, for the sake of the faith of those chosen by God and the knowledge of the truth that is in accordance with godliness’ (Titus 1:1). The ‘**outward form of godliness**’ is clearly not enough. It can even act as an instrument of self-deception, for it can coexist with the kind of vices just described. True godliness is the fruit of divine power. Timothy is to do all he can to encourage those in his care to open themselves to the purifying power of God’s Spirit who alone can transform us into Jesus.

2 Timothy 3:5

Avoid them!

Timothy is told to avoid members of the community who behave in the kinds of ways Paul has just described. He gave the same advice to the Corinthians, explaining that he did not mean they should avoid immoral people generally, ‘since you would then need to go out of the world’ (1Corinthians 5:10). Jesus ate with sinners and so must his disciples. Furthermore we are to love those caught up in vice, and thus be instruments to them of God’s saving grace.

Paul’s concern is for Christians who are in the community but living in the ways described. Such behaviour must be named for what it is, and, if those who are challenged refuse to repent, they must be avoided, which is another way of demanding that they be refused communion. This will limit the contagion. It is hoped that it will also persuade them to change their lives. The community must not pretend that it doesn’t matter.

2 Timothy 3:6-7

Avoid them! For among them are those who make their way into households and captivate silly women, overwhelmed by their sins and swayed by all kinds of desires, who are always being instructed and can never arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

It seems that certain women were especially vulnerable to being deceived by these false teachers. The teachers whom Paul is condemning were playing on the lack of education of certain women who were enjoying the new found social freedom which they experienced in the church and who were willing to support these charlatan teachers by attending (and paying for) lecture after lecture, though they were unable to discern that they were learning nothing of value, but were being duped.

2 Corinthians 3:8-9

As Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these people, of corrupt mind and counterfeit faith, also oppose the truth. But they will not make much progress, because, as in the case of those two men, their folly will become plain to everyone.

Paul likens these men of ‘corrupt mind and counterfeit faith’ to Pharaoh’s magicians (Exodus 7:11-12). They are not named in the biblical text, but are called Jannes and Jambres in the Palestinian Aramaic version of the story. Like these magicians, the false teachers are smart at working their magic, but ‘their folly will become plain to everyone’. Paul is confident in people’s basic good sense and ability, in time, to recognise what is counterfeit. However, Timothy is to do what he can to limit the damage which they can do in the meantime.