

2 Timothy 2

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In any job, there are requirements and standards that we have to meet in order to be successful at that job, even if the standards aren't very high. For instance, when I worked for McDonald's one summer long, long ago, I had to show up on time in the official McDonald's uniform, and I had to flip burgers or take orders or whatever to the best of my ability. If I and my fellow burger flippers didn't meet those standards, then the entire restaurant would suffer.

In the same way, in the second chapter of 2 Timothy, we see Paul laying out a series of standards for the work that Timothy was supposed to do. Of course, these expectations were much higher than for a wage slave at a fast-food emporium. Timothy had to know the word. He had to be disciplined and consistent in his service to God. He had to flee the sins that would wreck his ability to serve usefully. He had to have the tact necessary to persuade rather than offend people who opposed the truth. He even had to know how to pass his understanding along to men who could serve as he did. Only as he successfully did all of these things could he be a faithful servant of God.

Some people are inclined to dismiss Paul's words as meaningful only to men who are preachers like Timothy. Nothing could be further from the truth. In the Lord's church, there is no clergy class that goes out and does the work while the laypeople show up on Sunday morning and drop their contribution in the collection plate. That's not God's plan for His people. Instead, every one of us is to be an effective worker for the Lord. Every one of us is to know the word and be able to teach it to others. In short, every one of us is expected to live up to Paul's expectations for Timothy. When we consider this chapter in such a light, it quickly becomes apparent that Paul's words are not irrelevant but indispensable. Let's look at them and learn how to apply them to our lives as we study 2 Timothy 2.

The Truth About Eternity

Paul's description of his expectations begins with laying out **TIMOTHY'S PATH**. This appears in 2 Timothy 2:1-2. This path begins with Timothy himself and his own personal walk with God. He is required to be strong, although not strong in himself, but strong in the grace that God gives to those who seek it. Timothy wasn't going to succeed on his own, any more than we can today, but through the grace of God, all of us can receive the help we need to overcome.

However, Timothy's responsibility to the deposit with which he had been entrusted didn't end with personal faithfulness. What Paul had taught him, he had to teach others, and those men, if they were faithful, would continue passing down the inspired doctrine. This is an idea that should resonate with us today. Although our faith is based on the word, few of us came to a knowledge of the truth without help from a human teacher. In my own life, I will always owe a debt to my parents, my uncle, several gospel preachers, and numerous others who took the time to teach me, and most Christians will say the same. The way that we pay down that debt is by not allowing the gospel to die with us. When we teach our children, when we teach our brethren, when we teach our neighbors, that's when we prove worthy of the trust that our teachers placed in us. Let's be faithful to that trust. Let's continue to instruct others in the ways of Christ.

This instruction, although it was so important, wasn't going to be easy for Timothy. That's why Paul reminds him of the need for **DISCIPLINE**. Look at 2 Timothy 2:3-7. Clearly, if Timothy wanted to be rewarded for his service, he was going to have to work at it. This idea is completely foreign to the belief system that many hold. They think that we are justified by faith alone, that as long as we believe, we are not responsible for obeying. Just imagine how well this would work in the analogies that Paul uses here. I've never been a soldier or an athlete, but I know a little bit about the ways of the plant kingdom. I'm here to tell you, friends: I don't make things grow. God makes them grow, and without his blessing, I couldn't grow a thing. However, what happens if I am filled with faith in God's power to make things grow, but I never get out in my garden and water, weed, or pick the produce? At the end of the harvest, I would have nothing, because I wasn't disciplined enough to take advantage of God's blessing. That's the way things are with us. We are saved by faith in Jesus, no doubt, but we have to have the discipline to take advantage of that salvation.

Discipline doesn't come easily to anyone, so Paul's next stop is to explain the **MOTIVATION** for his own discipline. He elaborates on this in 2 Timothy 2:8-10. In the final analysis, Timothy could be sure of his reward, and we can be sure of our reward, because Jesus truly was raised from the dead. The resurrection is the proof that we too can have eternal life. To Paul, this was worth suffering for, but against the gospel, even the most oppressive human governments were limited. They could chain Paul, but they couldn't chain the word that he preached. Paul was willing to endure imprisonment for the sake of the truth that made men free. He knew that by continuing to preach, not only did he ensure salvation for himself, but he also made salvation possible for others. The same is true for us. Sometimes, evangelism is very discouraging, when we go all-out to teach someone, but they don't listen. That's when we need to remember what's at stake. If we spend our whole lives reaching out to the lost, but we only ever persuade one person,

isn't that worth it? Isn't the knowledge that we've turned a sinner from hell to heaven worth any amount of effort, any amount of perseverance? Let's stay faithful to the divine command to teach and sow the seed without becoming weary.

Paul further urges Timothy to be faithful through the use of **TRUSTWORTHY SAYINGS**. He records these for us in 2 Timothy 2:11-13. As with a passage in 1 Timothy 3 that we looked at a few weeks ago, it's likely that these verses record an early Christian hymn. Like many hymns that we sing, it's a call to endurance and faithfulness. It begins by describing the effect of our death to sin in the waters of baptism. Because we died in that prescribed way, we have the hope of life. If we continue on in that same spirit, if we persevere until the end of our earthly lives, that's the way that we ensure that we will reign with Jesus in heaven. That's the good news. The bad news is that if we don't, we won't. If we deny Jesus, whether with our lips or with our lives, we can be certain that He also will deny us before the Father on the day of judgment. If we are faithless, if we go back on our word, we can be certain that Jesus will never go back on His.

Some folks have the idea that on the last day, that God is going to go all warm and fuzzy and just wave everybody into heaven except for Hitler and the really bad people. Not so. God has solemnly warned all of mankind that if we are disobedient to His word, we will be condemned, and on that day, the disobedient will be condemned, just as He said. There is only one road to heaven for all of us, and that road requires us to walk according to the dictates of Christ.

Living for Eternity

Eternal life requires work, so Paul next encourages Timothy to be **A GOOD WORKER**. Look with me at 2 Timothy 2:14-15. Christianity isn't about arguing abstract points of doctrine in Bible class. It's about action. It's about service. If we believe that all of the doctrinal bickering is the focus of our faith, it will ruin us. Instead, in our study and in our lives, we need to make the Bible practical. We need to zero in on the things that will help us and others get to heaven. When we do this, when we instruct ourselves and others in godly living, that's when we use the word the way it's meant to be used. The Bible is not some kind of theological encyclopedia without relevance to the ordinary Christian. In fact, if we try to use it to settle all the theological questions we can dream up, it won't be very good at that, for the same reason that a hammer isn't very good at chopping down trees. It's not what it was designed for. However, when we use the word to teach righteousness, that's when it shines. That's when we're using the tool of the word for its intended purpose. If we handle the Bible in this way and live according to its precepts, we'll never have anything to be ashamed of before God.

Sadly, just as there were good workers in the kingdom, there were also **EVIL WORKERS**. Paul describes some of them in 2 Timothy 2:16-19. The problem with idle thoughts and idle words is that they have consequences. If we focus our teaching on spiritual babble, sooner or later, it will start costing souls. As evidence, Paul cites two men who argue that the resurrection has already occurred. Amazingly enough, there are brethren in the modern-day Lord's church who will argue this same thing, who claim that all of the resurrection passages in Scripture were fulfilled in 70 AD. It's easy to see why this teaching would cause people to abandon the Lord. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, if the dead are not raised, then our faith is vain. However, even when we see these and other false teachings have such a disastrous effect, we must remember that they cannot affect the truth. Even if the denominational world teaches a thousand different versions of Christianity, the Lord still knows who His people are. Even if evil men today attempt to rewrite the law of Christ in their own image, Jesus will still hold His disciples to the original standard. The devil loves to sow chaos and confusion, but if we simply keep our eyes fixed on Christ and His word, we will walk the path that leads to heaven.

Until that day, though, Paul wants Timothy to keep himself fit for **HONORABLE USE** in the kingdom. He explains the difference in 2 Timothy 2:20-22. He describes something familiar to all of us: different dishes for different uses. In our own house, we have a really nice crystal bowl that my sister gave us for a wedding gift, and we also have a nasty Tupperware container that we use to keep compost in until we dump it on the compost heap. We only use the crystal bowl when we're serving company, but I wouldn't even use the compost bowl to put leftovers in. Likewise, as Christians, we can corrupt and contaminate ourselves until we are no longer fit for the honorable uses of God's kingdom. We can do this by living an immoral life, or even just by engaging in the kind of contentious bickering Paul has been talking about all chapter long. Once we have dishonored ourselves, God is not going to be able to use us to bring our children to the Lord, or to teach outsiders about Christ, or to lead in the church. We've destroyed our own usefulness by our sin. On the other hand, when we remain pure, that is when we stay useful for the greatest works of God.

As part of this purity, we must conduct ourselves in a way fitting for **THE LORD'S BONDSEERVANT**. Paul discusses the characteristics of this bondservant in 2 Timothy 2:23-26. This passage warns us that whenever we're talking about Christianity with someone who doesn't agree with us, the object is not to win the argument. It's to win the heart. We don't win the lost for Christ when we come across as arrogant know-it-alls who think all non-Christians are evil idiots. We win them through humility, gentleness, patience, and an understanding both of the word and of our subject. Whether we're attempting to persuade someone to come to our Day of Reconciliation or just get them to obey the gospel generally, this is the way that we go about doing it. Now, even if we do everything right, that's no guarantee that the lost will listen. However, only with this approach that is marked above all by love can we have any hope of success.