

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 23 June 2002

No. T0219

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A Look at 2 Timothy: 2 Timothy 2:1-26 - Last Counsel for Godly Service

“**Faithful** - to be trusted, reliable, based upon firm persuasion or conviction”. That is a dictionary definition of a word that could be associated with 2 Timothy 2. Many of us may remember reading the story of *Greyfriars Bobby* by Eleanor Atkinson while at school. The story tells of the relationship between a shepherd and his dog on the hills overlooking Edinburgh. After spending years together, the relationship was eventually broken when the shepherd died. And yet even then the little dog remained faithful to his master, staying around Greyfriars cemetery, unwilling to leave.

If there is one quality that today's society undervalues, it is faithfulness. I remember when I was just a child hearing it said about such and such an individual, usually elderly Christian ladies, that they were faithful. They were always there, always to be relied upon. It wasn't the most exciting characteristic; it was almost as if when there was nothing more important to say about someone, then faithfulness was the safety net. Now, if I could have just one wish, it would be that people could say of me that I am faithful. A faithful husband, father, employee, friend and church member.

You will recall how in the parables of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), the servants were not commended for how much they had done. No, the commendation was “Well done! Good and **faithful** servant...” (Matthew 25:21, 23) Victorious Christian living has value, gifts are great, but faithfulness far exceeds them all. Upon the walls of the art gallery of the faithful, in Hebrews 11 are the words “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, they were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:14).

“**Faithful** - to be trusted, reliable, based upon firm persuasion or conviction”. It is fitting then, as we look at the last counsel of Paul for godly service in 2 Timothy 2, that the overriding theme is that of faithfulness. We shall look at 2 Timothy 2 in five sections:

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| 1. Individual responsibility: | 2 Timothy 2:1-2; |
| 2. The faithful servant: | 2 Timothy 2:3-10; |
| 3. A faithful God: | 2 Timothy 2:11-13; |
| 4. Faithful words: | 2 Timothy 2:14-18; |
| 5. Faithful actions: | 2 Timothy 2:19-26. |

1. Individual Responsibility - 2 Timothy 2:1-2

Let us then begin as we consider the matter of individual responsibility that Paul teaches in 2 Timothy 2:1-2: “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

Paul had had so much to say to Timothy. Some was concerning the Truth, some concerning others, but now Paul had something just for Timothy. He “buttonholes” Timothy. Regardless of what others do, Timothy, you be strong! There is a spiritual war going on, far more deadly, far more serious than any war on terrorism. It is a war in which the Devil doesn't take prisoners. The war is won but the battle still goes on for the lives and souls of each one of us. Paul would say to us in 2002, “Be strong! Don't give up!” But it is not to be strong in our self-confidence and abilities. They are bound to fail sooner or later. No, it is to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. As White (*The Expositor's Greek Testament - Volume 4*) puts it, “grace here has its simplest theological meaning, as the divine help, the unmerited gift of assistance that comes from God.” In our own spiritual battles when others may desert us and we find ourselves all alone, when temptation rages strong, it is this divine help, this unmerited gift of assistance from God that is enough for us, if we are not too big to accept it.

Now Timothy was to take what had been entrusted to Him and pass this on to others (2 Timothy 2:2). The faithful teaching of the absolute truth of God was not to be left to chance but, with care and diligence, was to be handed on. Who were the witnesses Paul speaks of in 2 Timothy 2:2? We aren't told but it does remind me that what we say and do is so often witnessed. Younger Christians may look at me to see if what I say retains any weight because of what I do. Non-Christian colleagues at work watch to see if Jesus has any relevance to the workplace today.

This “handing on” is vital for every generation. It was to be to those who were faithful, and able to teach (2 Timothy 2:2). It is sad to think that even so soon after the birth of the Church, Paul had to distinguish between those believers who were faithful, and those who were not. What may have just been a trickle in the first century has become a flood in the 21st. God’s word is unchanging and the truth it gives is immovable. The way we apply it must vary from one generation to the next, and from one culture to another. When my beliefs or actions, and God’s word oppose each other, then I can either change His word or His word can change me. Faithfulness follows the latter course, although it is immensely harder.

2. The Faithful Servant - 2 Timothy 2:3-10

“Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Timothy 2:10). In 2 Timothy 2:3-10, Paul introduces us to three pictures of what a faithful servant must be:

- a. Soldier: 2 Timothy 2:3-4;
- b. Athlete: 2 Timothy 2:5;
- c. Farmer: 2 Timothy 2:6.

None of them involve an easy life, a cost-free Christianity.

a. Soldier - 2 Timothy 2:3-4

In the picture of the soldier (2 Timothy 2:3-4), Paul introduces the element of endurance. It is not for a soldier to pick and choose which battles he fights in, nor to quit when he has had enough. Those decisions are just not his to make. We may wish that we had been born at a different time, to be a part of a large Christian revival. What matters is how we respond in the circumstances He has chosen to make us serve, in the generation He has chosen to make us serve. So in 2 Timothy 2:3 Paul says, “You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” The thought behind the words “endure hardship” is to take your share of suffering. Within Christianity, there can be no getting away from the fact that to live in a way that pleases Jesus means suffering. Sometimes it may seem endless, overwhelming. Perhaps today, you are sharing in this suffering. Don’t give up! You are not alone; this is what God has allowed for you. Give Him thanks for it and the victory is assured. There is nothing the Devil can do to the child of God who prays and praises even in the middle of suffering (see Acts 16:25). We all long for quiet times and easy days, and they will come. But for now endure hardship. One of the great differences between God and the Devil is this: God is all powerful, the Devil is not. If every Christian was true to Christ, and took their share of suffering, then the load would ease for some. Conversely, if I give up to the siren voice of compromise, then one of my Christian brothers or sisters will suffer that bit more.

Just outside Washington DC lies the battlefield of Manassas. During 1862, Northern hopes of a quick end to the American civil war died. Stonewall Jackson’s flank march with a small army held off a superior Northern force until General Lee arrived. As I read about this battle what amazed me was that, with so much at stake, so many Northern forces were just sitting around sunbathing and repairing boots, waiting to be committed to the action, whilst their comrades were being cut down by such a smaller force. If only they had been deployed straight away, years of war might not have been. But that is history. We live now and so much is still at stake. Lives to be won for Christ, His word to be put into practice, His honour to be maintained. Today, we need Christians to be committed, fully following His word, supporting one another in the spiritual fight. If we learn nothing else from the pages of history, it is what could have been, but wasn’t.

b. Athlete - 2 Timothy 2:5

The second picture is that of the athlete (2 Timothy 2:5). In ancient Greece, strict rules governed the athletes, not only during the games themselves, but also as regards the training. For example, each athlete had to complete at least 10 months training before entering the Olympic Games. Not to do so would lower the standard of the games. The crown is assured for all those who serve Jesus, but we do need to examine our lives carefully to see whether His word really does control my service for Him. You see, it is not just what we do for Jesus that matters, but how we do it that counts. To serve Him in a way that does not agree with His word just lowers the quality of Christian service.

c. Farmer - 2 Timothy 2:6

The final picture is that of the farmer (2 Timothy 2:6). Hard work, toil, is what characterises the farmer. “First comes the lessons, then the fun” ran the line in a favourite childhood story (*The Bike Lesson*, (The Berenstain Bears) by S & J Berenstain). In the instant society in which we live today, so often we want the blessings of Christianity now without being prepared to pay the cost first. No, Paul lays out the order here, first the hard work, then the fruits. If we truly

want to be like Christ, then let us follow His pattern, as Peter describes in 1 Peter 1:11 “the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would come.”

Before we move on to our next section it is just worth highlighting the difference in the names Paul uses for Jesus. When he has in view the Man on earth who is now in heaven, Paul uses the term Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 2:3, 8). However, when Paul is considering the One who left heaven to come as a Man upon earth, it is Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 2:10).

3. A Faithful God - 2 Timothy 2:11-13

Having looked at the faithful servant (2 Timothy 2:3-10) let us go on to see a faithful God in 2 Timothy 2:11-13: “For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.” Some see these words as part of an early Christian hymn. As we came to faith in Christ, our old sinful nature died. So Paul could write to the Galatians, “I am crucified with Christ...” (Galatians 2:20). What we give up on the one hand, God more than gives back; so we have a new life with Him. As we endure suffering on His behalf, we can find help in the promise that one day we shall reign with Him. But sadly, there are times when, like Peter, we may deny Him, in word or action (see Mark 14:27-31, 66-72). This is not a light matter. In a day to come there will be a reckoning for this disobedience. However the bottom line is that even should we become as one without faith, yet He will remain faithful to what He has said (2 Timothy 2:13). Let us be quite clear as we read 2 Timothy 2:11-13, that if we are considering our salvation, then once we are saved nothing can ever alter that. We can never be lost, even should we backslide to the point of living as an unbeliever (see John 10:27-30). Why? Because our salvation depends upon what He has done for us, and He remains faithful. If, as here, we are considering our service, then it is possible to arrive in heaven empty handed, due to a life of self-pleasing. We cannot then expect His commendation and reward. There can be few things worse than realising, too late, what we have forfeited for eternity because for a few brief years we frittered away our time in living for ourselves.

4. Faithful Words - 2 Timothy 2:14-18

It should come as no surprise that a faithful God would encourage faithful words. So our next section, from 2 Timothy 2:14-18, begins with the instruction: “Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers” (2 Timothy 2:14).

Perhaps like me, when you read the history of the Israelites in the Old Testament, you wonder how they could have been so foolish. They had so much going for them, and yet they made mistake after mistake. It's a good job God's love is infinite. But then you look at the history of the Church and realise that, with infinitely greater promises, it has made an equal mess of thing, and I am a part of that. So often it has come down to words. Over-emphasising one part of His word, disregarding another. Making sure my views are the most loudly proclaimed. I'm not for one moment saying we should compromise what Scripture teaches for the sake of outward calm. If only we all more closely allowed His word to mark our lives and our collective life. Sometimes, however, we are sure that our position is the only right one that we forsake what His word actually says, and substitute our words. The Greek word used for 'ruin' in 2 Timothy 2:14 is '*katastrophē*'. The damage we have done to one another, and to the honour of Christ, is nothing short of a catastrophe. So needless, so sinful. Instead of such negative actions, Paul urges Timothy to be diligent in rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). If we take nothing else away from this chapter today, then let us at least take away a desire to be wholehearted in reading, and understanding, without preconditions, what His word has to say to us. One can only wonder what Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Timothy 2:16) will say to God as they stand before Him and give an account of their words, and the effect they had on some of His precious children.

5. Faithful Actions - 2 Timothy 2:19-26

So we come to the final section of this chapter, from 2 Timothy 2:19-26. In it we shall consider faithful actions, the acts that honour God that come from a right understanding of His word. “Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.’” We have in 2 Timothy 2:19 a quote from Numbers 16:5, and probably Isaiah 52:11. They provide the sure basis for every believer. God knows each one who has turned to Him in faith, but having done so, the only fitting response is to forsake sinful living. Paul backs this up with a picture. In a great house there are precious objects, made from beautiful materials, but there are also cheap objects made from everyday materials. Some would see in this a statement of what God has done for us. He has made us like those precious vessels. Others would suggest this refers to our actions. Right living makes us like a precious vessel, whilst living to please myself makes me like a vessel of clay. There is truth in both of these views. God has made us precious to Himself. How could we be otherwise, when we cost Him His Son. But as such we are to live up to our calling, to act like a golden bowl, ready to pour out on those around us the blessing of God. You will remember how King Belshazzar used the golden vessels from the temple to make himself drunk! (see Daniel 5:1-12) He had made those precious vessels base. Sometimes we are in danger of doing just that as we exercise insufficient control over what we watch and listen to on TV, or as we

get angry behind the wheel of our car. God has made us the best, His children; now we need to live up to the expectations He has for us.

As Paul closes 2 Timothy 2, he gives instruction as to how this can be done. It is not so much a case of knowing what we must not do, as so filling our time that we have no time left to do what is wrong. If my mind is so full of thinking what to say to a neighbour about Christ, of another preaching engagement, then I will have less time to think about the wrongs somebody may have done me. If I am so busy helping visiting the sick or housebound, then I will have no time left to watch a seedy film or get drunk at the pub. And covering all these faithful actions is a sense of humility. Anything good in me is as a result of what He has given me.

It would be fitting to finish this morning by reading the words of 2 Timothy 2:10, and by letting them guide each one of us in the days and weeks to come, until He comes again for us. "Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."

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