

Feb. 17, 2019

The Grace that is In Christ

2 Timothy 2:1

The hard things God requires of us are always matched by the grace he provides for us in the unmerited assistance in Christ.

LTS: John 15:1-11

Last week I suggested to you that every faithful church is always only one generation away from losing the gospel. I believe that about every faithful church wherever it may be, and I believe it regarding our own church. We are always only one generation away from losing the gospel. Its true in our day and it was true in Paul's day. And it was especially true in the church of Ephesus where Timothy had been sent to pastor.

Ephesus was a church Paul had planted with his own hands. He had actually ministered there personally for three years. His preaching and teaching had a profound effect upon the land of Asia-Minor (Present-day Turkey).

We might be tempted to think that with a man like Paul at the helm it must have been a church that was practically perfect in every way. But Paul's church in Ephesus was like every church. It had some significant problems. In fact, since this was a first-generation church, they had extraordinary problems. There were no 2nd or 3rd generation Christians who had blazed the trail before them and answered many a thorny question in the past. There had been no past!

When you read Paul's first letter to Timothy it becomes apparent that there were problems among the elders. Some were proving themselves unqualified for the office, hence Paul's lengthy instructions about qualifications of elders. There were apparently issues among the deacons, and teachers as well. But the problems at Ephesus were not only among the leading men of the church. There were also problems with some of the prominent women in the church.

Some of these women were pressing for the right to teach and lead whenever the church gathered. They were essentially vying for seats among the elders of the church. On that particular issues Paul ordered Timothy to declare, "I do not allow a woman to teach or have authority over a man." As Steve Lawson describes the situation, Timothy was faced with "passive men and aggressive women."

The church was also overlooking the care of the widows, and there were “money-people” in the church who were setting a bad example and throwing their influence around in inappropriate ways. Beyond that, false teachers had already weaseled their way into the leadership the church – and, in all probability, a couple of them may have become elders. In fact, there is a name of a man in 1 Tim that shows up again here in 2nd Tim as an example of the kind of wayward leaders in the church. In 1 Tim 1:20 Paul tells us that some men in the church had drifted so far off course they had shipwrecked their faith. Among them is a man by the name of Hymenaeus. Then, here in 2nd Tim we learn (2:17) that Hymenaeus was still causing trouble. He is listed as one of the false teachers who say that the resurrection had already happened. And they were upsetting the faith of some.”

In any case, this was the state of the church to which Paul assigned Timothy. It was a difficult assignment. And Paul seems to think that Timothy is showing signs of fading. He is beginning to struggle inwardly in a way that concerned Paul. His courage was slipping. He was giving in to his natural timidity.

In his second (and final) letter, therefore, Paul writes to Timothy in part to help him get his courage back and to lead the church NOT in a perfunctory way, but with renewed courage and zeal.

Notice the first words of chapter 2. Paul says, “You then my child, be strengthened...” or “Be strong.” What was he going to need that strength for? Well he needed strength too...

- a. "Fan into flame the gift [of preaching, teaching, and evangelizing] the Lord had given him" (1:6)
- b. "Overcome his disposition toward timidity and fear (1:7)
- c. Endure the suffering he would experience as a result (1:8)
- d. "Guard the treasure ("good deposit") of the gospel" (1:14)
- e. Address the remnants of false teaching
- f. But for our purposes this morning, Timothy will need real spiritual strength to train Future Faithful Me; future

To use Paul’s terminology, Timothy would need significant spiritual strength to train men in the “sound words” which Paul had taught him. But the goal went beyond mere theological education. Paul wanted Timothy to train faithful men in a manner that would equip them to train others also (this is what we see in vv. 1-2).

Then in verses 3-7 Paul offers three illustration of the kind of labor-intensive ministry necessary to right this struggling, drifting church. Timothy would wouldn’t

get there by being lazy. He wouldn't get there by being a fearful follower. No, he would need to labor like an Athlete, like a Soldier, and like a Farmer.

This morning, however, we only have time to discuss the first two verses. But in preparation for studying this whole section let's stand together and read verses 1-7.

Read 2 Tim. 2:1-7

In the first two verses I see two themes:

I. Christ's Powerful Provision: (1)

II. The Pastor's Essential Mission: (2)

I. Christ's Powerful Provision:

Summary: God never commands us to do what he does not also empower us to do.

1. Paul says, "You then, my child," or "You, therefore, child..." Whenever we see a "therefore," we normally look at the preceding verses to remind ourselves of what the author most recently said. In this case (1:15-18) Paul has just offered two examples of unfaithful men and one example of a man worth imitating. In this case, however, it seems that the preceding comments are intended to highlight the intensity of Paul's concern for the future ministry of Timothy as he pastors in Paul's place after his execution.¹

2. If timothy was going to rise to the occasion, if he was going to be the leader God needed him to be in these critical days of the early church, he was going to need a strength that exceeded his own. Where does a timid person find the power to be courageous? Paul tells us. He says, "You then, my child..."

3. The term "my child" is NO put-down. Paul wasn't calling timothy a spiritual adolescent, or a weakling. "My child" is actually a term people use in the bible when a person wants to address someone with whom they have a relationship of personal endearment. At the end of the Gospel of John, after the resurrection, Jesus finds his disciples out in a boat fishing and calls them "children."

¹ Rienecker & Rogers, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek N.T.*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1988), 160

4. Paul says “You then, my child”; my dear one, my dear man or my dear friend. Notice the tenderness with which Paul exhorts Timothy. And his exhortation is this: *“be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”*

5. “Be strengthened” (ESV) is a better translation than the “be strong” (NASB) because the verb is actually a passive imperative. In other words, the power Timothy needs finds its source NOT within the heart of Timothy, but from a source outside of himself; namely, Christ.

6. Paul wasn’t telling Timothy to pick himself up “by the boot-straps,” and “man up,” but to be re-energized by the grace that is in Christ. The word “grace” here has the simplest theological meaning. It means “divine help”, or the “unmerited gift of assistance” that comes from God.²

7. This was Timothy needed. He didn’t need to muster up more self-confidence. He didn’t need to read the latest pop-psychology on how to overcome your fears. What he needed was to step out in faithful obedience to the will of God trusting that God would never command him to do something he didn’t also give him to strength and ability to do.

8. What Timothy needed was to be “strengthened by the grace of God that is in Christ Jesus.” This is not a NEW teaching in the Bible. This is all over the O.T., and even here in the N.T.

- a. **Eph. 1:19**, Paul prays for us that we would know “what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might.
- b. **Eph. 3:16** Paul prays “that according to the riches of [Christ’s] glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,
- c. **Eph. 6:10** (Pre. Pass. Imp.) “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might...” (Spiritual warfare).
- d. **Phil 4:13**, in the midst of his suffering he declares, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”
- e. Paul depended on this strength in his own life. **2 Tim. 4:17** After relaying to timothy that at his first defense all who are in Asia deserted him, he writes: “But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed, and all the Gentiles might hear it.”

² Ibid, 160

9. You see, God often calls us to do things that feel like they are above and beyond our ability - and they are! And then, when we choose to trust Him and rely on his strength (his wisdom, his might), he accomplishes his will through us. He gets all the glory and we get the joy!

10. On the other hand, those who wish to be assisted by God's grace must NOT think of ourselves merely as passive recipients. Yes, God is sovereign in his giving of the gracious assistance we need, but that doesn't take away man's responsibility. Paul is commanding Timothy to do this.

11. The touchstone of such thinking is no less that the teaching of Jesus who (John 15:5) said, "I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is who bears much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing."

12. The power of fruitfulness in the Christian life is in vital connection (union) with Jesus Christ. The grace is given freely, but we are commanded to Act, to Engage, to Abide or Remain "in Christ." That is, to keep one's self in a conscious state of personal dependence upon the unmerited grace of Christ.

13. This isn't some kind of "Let go and let God" theology. No, this requires the hard work of dependent faith that confesses NOT one's own strength but one's inability to accomplish anything for man's good and God's glory apart from the unmerited assistance that is in Christ.

14. We see an example of this teaching playing out in Paul's own life. In his second letter to the church at Corinth he wrote about his own weakness.

Read 2 Cor. 12:7-10

15. You see, Timothy's natural timidity actually presented him with opportunities to see the unmerited grace of divine assistance bear fruit in his ministry.

16. So, when Paul says, "Be Strengthened by the grace that is in Christ," he means, tap into the power of your dependence. How do you do that? Let me make a suggestion that I think is consistent with Paul's teaching.

- a. **Confess your Dependence:** "the ministry assignment before me (in the next moment, day, or week) feels beyond my ability."
- b. **Believe in Christ's Abundance;** "Jesus, I believe that the grace of strength (wisdom, ability) I need right now is freely available in you."
- c. **Ask for the strength** (wisdom, ability) you need. "Lord, please grant me the unmerited assistance you have promised for my

need.”

- d. **Move decisively** (added) (perhaps trembling) in obedient faith.
- e. **Thank God** for the sovereign, invisible work he will accomplish through you for His glory and your joy

17. Your next assignment may be:

- a. An opportunity to share the gospel (I thank God for all the stories we have been hearing of your renewed faithfulness to share the gospel)
- b. The need to take a stand for Christ among your coworkers or friends.
- c. The need to discipline one of your children
- d. The need to walk through the minefield of a difficult conversation with your spouse.
- e. The mandate to confront a brother/sister in Christ at your church about sin you witnessed with your own eyes (or ears).

Gospel Proclamation:

NOTE: At this point in the sermon I chose to end it rather than touch on the 2nd theme. I also renamed this sermon because the emphasis ended up being exclusively on “**Strengthened By The Grace That Is In Christ**” rather than on “**Future Faithful Men.**”