

# Maximus

Soldier. Athlete. Farmer.

**2 Timothy 2:1** Therefore You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus,  
<sup>2</sup> and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.  
<sup>3</sup> Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.  
<sup>4</sup> No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.  
<sup>5</sup> An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.  
<sup>6</sup> It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.  
<sup>7</sup> Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.  
<sup>8</sup> Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel,  
<sup>9</sup> for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!  
<sup>10</sup> Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.  
<sup>11</sup> **The saying is trustworthy**, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him;  
<sup>12</sup> if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us;  
<sup>13</sup> if we are faithless, he remains faithful-- for he cannot deny himself.  
<sup>14</sup> Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers.  
<sup>15</sup> Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.  
<sup>16</sup> But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness,

<sup>17</sup> and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus,

<sup>18</sup> who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.

<sup>19</sup> But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

<sup>20</sup> Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable.

<sup>21</sup> Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

<sup>22</sup> So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

<sup>23</sup> Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.

<sup>24</sup> And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,

<sup>25</sup> correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,

<sup>26</sup> and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

(2 Tim 2:1-26)

## **Soldier. Athlete. Farmer.**

*Gladiator* in a 2000 epic historical drama starring Russell Crowe as General **Maximus Decimus Meridius**, meaning Maximum Tithe of the Veteran.<sup>1</sup> Maximus was a Spaniard

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<sup>1</sup> I kind of made this up, but not really. *Maximus* literally means "maximum." *Decimus* literally means "a tenth," which is what a tithe is. *Meridius* is probably thought of as referring to his home, Mérida of Spain (he is simply called "The Spaniard," they never say what town he is from). But this town itself comes from

and the greatest **military commander** under Emperor Marcus Aurelius, played Richard Harris. The beginning of the movie sees Maximus ready to return home to lead a peaceful quiet life of a **farmer** with his wife and young son. But just as the wars of the Republic are coming to an end, Marcus confides in Maximus that he wishes him to rule the Empire in the place of his son—a despicable, power-hungry human being, unfit to serve the people of Rome.

**Rooted loosely** in the lives of the real Marcus Aurelius (r. 161-180) and his son Commodus (r. 176-192), the older emperor wishes to return Rome to her glory days as a republican government. But Commodus, played by Joaquim Phoenix, overhears the plot and murders his father in his sleep. He immediately arrests Maximus, who escapes with serious wounds, but finds his way home only to discover his wife, son, and **farm** burned to a crisp. He is quickly taken captive where he is sold into the usually short life of slavery as a gladiator, where he is forced to fight as **an athlete** in games to the death. As he wins victory after victory, he quickly becomes one of the greatest living heroes of the games. Each time he steps into the arena, he bends down and rubs the soil between his fingers, reminding

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the Latin *emerita* meaning retired or veteran. One webpage has it mean “Maximus The Tenth of the Tribe of Merida.” Yes, other people besides me actually think about these things.

himself of that [farming](#) life he would never know again because of Commodus. At one point, when he arrives on the grandest stage of the Coliseum itself, The Spaniard, as he has been called, reveals that he is in fact the great [General](#) of the Roman army and he is here to kill the Emperor.

The real-life Commodus ruled for many years as emperor until he was assassinated, thus ending the so-called golden period of peace (*Pax Romana*) in the Roman Empire. The historical Commodus was a megalomaniacal dictator who created a deific personality cult of himself and also performed as a gladiator in the Colosseum, probably rigging the games in his favor. In 192 AD, after hearing of a list of names Commodus intended to have executed, his mistress Marcia sent his [wrestling](#) partner Narcissus to strangle him in his bath. This man became the inspiration behind the character Maximus, who was actually called Narcissus in the first script.

In this [one person](#), Maximus, three different stages of the life of one man are clearly defined. He was a [soldier](#). He was an [athlete](#). He was a [farmer](#). In one of the rare multiple analogies used by the Apostle Paul to make a point, [all three appear near the beginning of 2 Timothy 2](#) where together they emphasize the single-mindedness (the soldier),

discipline (the athlete), and hard-work (the farmer)<sup>2</sup> needed to lead the church by **ministers of the Gospel**. But the specific point made to Timothy as the pastor at Ephesus may also be applied more broadly to all Christians as they “*fight the good fight*” of faith, *exercising the rules of God* in their lives, so that they might share in the great *harvest* of God at the end of the age, doing all this in a wicked world hell-bent on destroying their minds, their morals, and sometimes even their mortal bodies.

## **The Gospel Front and Center: The Structure of 2 Timothy 2**

We saw last time that 2 Timothy 2 shares much in common with the first chapter. At **the heart** of both is sound doctrine and theology which serves as the foundation for the faithful life of God’s ministers and people. At least some of the first chapter was **chiastic** in nature and it appears that this is possibly true here in the second chapter as well. In my reading of it, the center is the final “**trustworthy saying**” in the letters to timothy.

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<sup>2</sup> **Philip H. Towner**, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 495.

- A. Timothy strengthened by grace in Christ (2:1)
- B. Suffer as a soldier (3-4)
- C. Athlete is not crowned unless compete by rules (5)
- D. Hard-working farmer (6)
- E. Lord gives understanding (7)
- F. Remember (8)
- G. I endure (10)
- H. Trustworthy saying (11)**
- G'. We endure (12)
- F'. Remind (14)
- E'. Ruins the hearers (14b)
- D'. A worker not ashamed (15)
- C'. Hymenaeus & Philetus swerved (16-18), the Lord's seal (19a)
- B'. Military quotes (19ff.), Lord's servant enduring evil (24), opponents (25)
- A'. Enemies escape the snare of the devil through repentance (25b-26)<sup>3</sup>

On either side of the trustworthy saying, we have the exhortations of Timothy to endure as Paul has **endured** (G, G'), to **remember and remind** (F, F') others of the Gospel which leads to either **understanding or ruin** (E, E'), and to diligently do his work as would a **hard-working farmer** (D), an **athlete** (C), and a **soldier** (B), unlike others who should be ashamed of their **work** (D'), swerve and **cheat**, breaking God's laws (C'), and take the wrong side in the **war** (B'). All

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<sup>3</sup> I've developed this with the combined help of Paul Jeon (who sees the first three verses of ch. 2 attached chiastically to 1:13-18 and 2:4-19 as a second chiasm) and Christine Smith (whose chiasm consists of the totality of ch. 2, with matching smaller chiasms in the "c" elements). See **Paul S. Jeon**, *2 Timothy: Fight the Good Fight, Finish the Race, Keep the Faith* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020), 64-65, 78-79 and **Christine Smith**, "2 Timothy 2," *A Little Perspective* (Oct 2016), <https://www.alittleperspective.com/2-timothy-2-2016/>.

this he is to do as he is strengthened by **grace in Christ Jesus**, in hopes that even his opponents that persecute him might themselves be granted repentance and **escape the snare of the devil** (A, A’).

As it is a letter to *Timothy*, you can read throughout this chapter how this man of God, this worker of the Gospel, is to do these things for the sake of others that they might come to faith in Christ or be turned from their present sins committed in the name of Christ and be truly converted and forgiven. Paul has a high view of the visible church, and the offices God has given her to carry out this eternal business. It is thus vital to first and foremost see this chapter not as what you are to leave this sermon understanding that you should do but realizing that this is what you should be expecting your pastor(s) to do. Thus, ch. 2 sees the **practical outworking** of the requirements of elders given in the first letter in the life of the church. And along those lines, it is important to see that chapter 2 moves us from the **past** (ch. 1) into the **present** (ch. 2), which will then carrying on into the **future** (chs. 3-4) not only for Timothy, but for all the pastors and churches that follow.

**Unfortunately**, too much of the church does not take **the qualifications** for pastors and deacons, nor the practical

outworking of **how and what** they are to devote themselves to, seriously enough. Some do not take it seriously *at all*, as they ask their pastor to do just about everything (professional counsellor, marketing and management expert [CEO], best friend, approachable, funny, clever, etc.) but stand for God's law and Christ's Gospel by rightly handling the word of truth (**2Tim 2:15**) and training himself to carry out the work of God according to our three analogies. When the church does not do this, what happens in the **future** (chs. 3-4) will have terrible consequences for pastor and church-goer alike.

As we move through the chapter, I will go verse by verse but then take each of those verses and look at what I believe is the matching pair in the corresponding part later in the chapter. This will lead us to consider **the trustworthy saying as the last thing** we will look at, even though it comes in the middle of the chapter. In this way, I hope to end with the central theme of the chapter, which as usual is the only power any church leader or Christian has of obeying these things faithfully—the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

## **The Pastor (and Christian) as Soldier, Athlete, Farmer**

Paul begins with the same idea he began the first chapter. He thinks about Timothy as **his child** (**2:1**; see **1:2**). But

whereas many of the verbs in chapter 1 were in some form of *past* tense, now the verbs move to the *present* tense. “**Be strengthened**” is the first of many. It is vital that the pastor never rest on what he has come through or things that have happened to him in the past. The Christian life does have looking back at the past as something important to do, but we **live in the present**, in the here and now. There are always new situations that confront, new challenges, new temptations. Each of these and more are like waves that continually beat at the walls of the fortress, weakening them, making them less resilient, loosening the mortar, thinning their thickness, eventually leading them to crumble and fall apart.

The solution to this is to be strengthened “**by the grace that is in Christ Jesus**” (2:1). **Grace** is that special favor of God that comes because his wrath is removed even as his holiness has been satisfied. This happens only through the God-man whose title “**Messiah**” (Christ) comes before his name “**Jah-Saves**” (Jesus). The long expected and awaited Savior of Israel has come, and it is through him that God gives grace to strengthen and sustain through whatever situation the Christian finds himself. But it must be **diligently sought**, for this is the responsibility of all

Christians in their sanctification, who like young children forget and constantly need the reassurance of what he has done. This is for the sake of the well-being of you minds and spirits, so that you might understand the transformation God has given you in Christ so that you might lead lives of obedience to him, rather than always feeling defeated and weak and tired, wanting to give up, which comes because you fail to take seriously the command to be strengthened by grace time and again in the present through the means of grace God has given to you. **Availing yourself** in this matter will have nothing but great results in the way you think about and walk through life.

I believe that **the end of the chapter**, which leads directly (in **3:1ff**) to what happens when this strengthening, especially from your pastor, is not constantly being attended in the present, parallels the grace in Christ. The last verses speak of others (“**they**”), who need to “**come to their senses**” (**26**). Timothy is to be a man of good sense and strengthen himself in grace. But if the end is connected to the beginning, then he is to do this, *not merely for himself*, but for the sake of these people who are not acting according to sense, but nonsense, bad sense, no sense. Why? So that they might “**escape from the snare of the devil, after being**

captured by him to do his will” (26). The devil here is the inverse parallel to Christ Jesus (the great opposite), while escaping his clutches is the direct parallel to God’s being strengthened by grace. It is a very specific form of grace, perhaps the greatest of all—escaping hell itself and being transformed to live lives pleasing to him.

Being captured is, of course, language of *warfare*. The devil has taken people captive, just like Maximus was as he looked upon the burning of his fields and family. In the previous verse, our thus far unidentified “they” were called Timothy’s “opponents” (25). These opponents need to escape the captivity of the devil, but the only way this can happen is if, “God may perhaps *grant them repentance learning to a knowledge of the truth*” (25b). This important verse explains something that many people badly misunderstand and matches the first verse about bring strengthened by grace. People cannot repent of their own freewill. Why? The reason stated here is because they lack a knowledge of the truth. Without such knowledge, without knowing truth, you cannot turn towards the truth. The best you can do is grope about in darkness hoping to stumble upon it. But even when you found it, you wouldn’t know it because you were blind to it, for you have no knowledge of it.

This presupposes a biblical view of human depravity which must always be the backdrop of grace. And grace is what we learn is needed as God must grant repentance to people like this. Granting repentance is elsewhere something God must do. “God exalted [Christ] ... as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel” (Acts 5:31). “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life” (11:18). The Lord “opened [Lydia’s] heart to believe” (16:14). Faith is not your own doing but is “the gift of God” (Eph 2:8). And it is “granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake” (Php 1:29). Too many people use this doctrine as a means to quarrel and fight, and we’ll come to that subject soon enough. But it is not given for that purpose. Rather, these verses are given to help strengthen you in your own faith, that God has done all that is necessary to save you, including even giving you the faith to believe in him and turn towards him, the one who rescues and saves from the prison of hell itself. If you trust in him, then you know it is of him. And that is an encouraging thought.

It is this warfare imagery through Satan and these “opponents” that I want us to now focus on, because this corresponds to the first of our three analogies, which take

up vv. 3-4 (the B, B' pair). Before we look at those verses, however, we should first look at **verse 2**. Just as verse 1 had the inverse parallel to Satan (Christ Jesus), so this verse has the inverse parallel of the “opponents.” These are the “many witnesses” and “faithful men” that were there when Paul talked to Timothy in person when he was at Ephesus. The purpose of this verse is to set up the rest of the chapter by reminding the young pastor that he is to take what he learned from the Apostle and “teach others also” the same things.

“Teaching others” has an equivalent, as we already now expect, in vs. 24-25a. “The Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, *able to teach*, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.” This helps you see that the beginning and end are related. But you’ll notice that it is right here that we also see themes about *quarreling* and *the opponents* that we have already mentioned. Now, I want to bring two more things out of this passage that match up with vs. 3.

The first is “patiently enduring evil.” This very clearly ties to the beginning of vs. 3, “Share in *suffering*...” It also matches vv. 10 and 12, on either side of the Trustworthy saying. “Therefore I endure...” and “If we endure...”

Because this is so close to the center, I'll come back to it, but for now notice again *the present tense* of all this. The entire chapter is unified in the need to obey these commands in an ongoing, present manner. You must not give up, especially enduring the evil that God leaves us in this world to endure for his sake, even as the Apostle and pastor are to endure it for yours (as Paul says, “I endure for the sake of the elect”).

The *second* is “*the Lord’s servant*.” The word servant is the common word that Paul uses for his own relationship to Christ—*doulos* or “slave.” We’ve seen that metaphor already used of the Gladiator. But the Gladiator was himself first a warrior. In fact, I think the imagery of *doulos* extends beyond the slave-master relationship to that of a Commander to his warriors. Remember, Jesus is the one who *frees* us from captivity; this is warfare language, which means that he is viewed there are the Captain of the Armies of God. But this is precisely what Paul talks about in *vs. 3* after “*share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus*.” Again, Christ is the Commander. And this introduces us to the first of the three metaphors—a soldier. But if we are slaves of Christ, and Christ is the Commander, then the servant language of *vs. 24* isn’t really about a master/slave, but is being used as a warfare idea.

## *Soldier*

Let's turn to this thought of a soldier more specifically. What might Paul have in mind practically speaking by using this analogy? Towner suggests “single-minded devotion to duty.”<sup>4</sup> A soldier does not have the option to do whatever he wants. He is obliged to obey. But this single-minded devotion is necessary and good. Calvin is similar. He says, “Without patient endurance of evils, there will never be perseverance. And accordingly he adds, ‘as becomes a good soldier of Jesus Christ.’ By this term he means that all who serve Christ are warriors, and that their condition as warriors consists, not in inflicting evils, but rather in patience.”<sup>5</sup>

Paul gets specific in his own way in vs. 4. “No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.” Civilian pursuits would have to be the opposite of military pursuits. In other words, you put down your sword and do something, anything else. Now, it is obvious that the main point of this saying is that we are to live our lives to please God, who granted us repentance and enlisted us into the Lord's Army (Yes sir!). For a long time,

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<sup>4</sup> Towner, *Letters*, 492.

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 210.

I puzzled over whether Paul might have had anything else in mind by it and why he so quickly just moves on to the next analogy.

But then it struck me that *if the chapter is chiasmic*, perhaps something later, in the appropriate parallel, might shed some more light on this. I'm going to make the argument here that I've not seen elsewhere, which is that in fact it does. We've already seen military imagery popping up at the end of the chapter with the Lord's servant, the opponents, and being taken captive by the devil. Could there be more to the parallel than these?

Beginning in *vs. 19*, the Apostle has a series of *allusions and quotes of the OT*. Looking into these is extremely interesting. He says, "*But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, 'Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.'*" God's firm foundation is an allusion to *Isaiah 28:16 LXX*. "*Therefore, thus saith the Lord, even the Lord, Behold, I lay for the foundations of Zion a costly stone, a choice, a corner-stone, a precious stone, for its foundations; and he that believes on him shall by no means be ashamed.*" This is one of the most quoted and alluded passages in the NT (cf. *Rom 9:33; 10:11; 1Cor 3:11; Eph 2:20; 1Pet 2:4,*

6). Isaiah is giving us the imagery of a **house**, or probably better, a temple, which will appear in the next verse in Timothy. Paul discusses a “**seal**.” “Seals (*sphragis*) were used commonly to identify legal ownership of property and, like signatures in modern practice, to guarantee authenticity, genuineness, and integrity, or to preserve the secrecy of the contents of a letter or of some product. In this case, “seal” is used in a figurative sense to denote **God’s ownership of ‘the foundation’** (= the church) just mentioned.”<sup>6</sup>

Paul then describes the twofold content of the seal by using two OT passages. Towner says, “These two statements in effect bring together theology in what is affirmed and ethics in the response that people are called to make in the crisis situation.”<sup>7</sup> **What kind of a crisis?** The first quote “**The Lord knows those who are his**” is nearly **word for word** of **Num 16:5**, the only difference being “the Lord” replaces “God,” meaning, of course, **that the Lord Jesus is God!**

It’s the famous story of Korah and his *war* against Moses and Aaron. In other words, it is **a military quote**, albeit in a spiritual war, at least at first. Korah, himself a cousin of the other two, was a Levite, but he didn’t like the fact that they

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<sup>6</sup> Philip H. Towner, “1-2 Timothy and Titus,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 904.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

were telling him that he was not holy enough to be a priest of the people. So he riles up the congregation and is ready to go to physical blows with his cousins. He was effectively waging war on God's right to choose whom he wills. "And he spoke to Core and all his assembly, saying, *God has visited and known those that are his* (καὶ ἔγνω ὁ θεὸς τοὺς ὄντας αὐτοῦ; compare with Paul's, ἔγνω κύριος τοὺς ὄντας αὐτοῦ) and who are holy, and has brought them to himself; and whom he has chosen for himself, he has brought to himself" (Num 16:5 LXX). The point is, Korah was not a real believer, and he was waging war on God and his servants. For his rebellion, God destroyed Korah and all his household by opening the earth and swallowing them up alive, before they could harm his own servants.

The *second quote* comes from two chapters earlier in Isaiah. "Let everyone *who names the name of the Lord* depart from iniquity" comes from Isaiah 26:13 LXX, "O Lord our God, take possession of us: O Lord, we know not any other beside thee: *we name thy name.*" "In this case the statement, extending the thought of the previous line, calls on the faithful to separate themselves from evil and so show their allegiance to God."<sup>8</sup> *Allegiance* is again military language.

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<sup>8</sup> Philip H. Towner, "1-2 Timothy and Titus," 905.

Choose your side, the war is on. In other words, both of these quotes fit perfectly as parallels to the soldier analogy, just as we would expect if a chiasm were present.

If this “B” section begins (19) and ends (24-25) with military ideas, what about the parts in the middle? If “departing from iniquity” is a call to arm to fight the good fight, then vv. 20-21 address in a different analogy what that means. “Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.” This “house” sounds very similar to the temple, with its vessels of gold and silver. It need not be a temple, though that fits with the allusion to the firm foundation. The point of this example is that a person must become clean from ritual and moral impurity, and then they will be a vessel for honorable use.<sup>9</sup>

What that means is defined at the end by “ready for every good work.” This is then taken very specifically in a moral direction. “So flee youthful passions and pursue

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<sup>9</sup> Though it is the same language found in Romans 9:21-23, the application is quite different in Romans where the point there is that God, the Potter, has the right to make any kind of vessel he so chooses and no one can tell him that he was wrong to do it. In that passage, there is no option given for a person “cleansing himself.” He simply is what he is.

righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart” (22). This ties directly to vs. 19’s warfare language through a very obvious mini-chiasm:

- A. Everyone who names the name of the Lord (19)
- B. Warfare: Depart from iniquity (19b)
- C. Vessels (20)
- D. Cleanses himself (21a)**
- C’. Vessels (21b)
- B’. Warfare: Flee youthful passions and pursue ... (22a)
- A’. Along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart (22b)

This is precisely what Paul means elsewhere when he tells us to put on the armor of God (Eph 6) and engage in the spiritual war that rages around us. Surely Paul is thinking about that here, for these things he mentions are mostly found in Ephesians 6’s spiritual armor: **Righteousness**: the breastplate of righteousness (Eph 6:14). **Faith**: the shield of faith (16). **Peace**: the gospel of peace (15).

**Love** is the counter to the vicious darts of the enemy that comes through “foolish, ignorant controversies” that “breed quarrels” (23), which Timothy is again told to stay far away from as a pastor. Of course, love is the greatest virtue that sums up everything: Love is patient, kind, it does not envy or boast, is not arrogant or rule. It does not insist on its own

way; it is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (1Cor 13:4-7). And this last one, **endurance**, is a word found throughout 2 Timothy 2.

## *Athlete*

That's a lot more than we might initially think about the soldier metaphor, all made possible by a close reading of the passage. But we can continue this by looking at **the next metaphor** after it. Paul switches from a soldier to an **athlete**. “**An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules**” (2Tim 2:5). In the first letter, we learned that Timothy most likely engaged in sports at one of the arenas found in ancient Ephesus. So this example is one he would have been quite keen to listen to. The key here is the **crown** and competing **according to the rules**. Athletes who have dedicated much to their sport have moved beyond the introductory “play to have fun.” They play *to win*. They want the crown. There is no crown for losing. But one has to compete fairly. **Cowboy Bob Orton**, who used to wear a cast on his arm as he wrestled always stashed some kind of object in it like a a piece of metal or a razor blade that he

would use to cheat and win his match. Sometimes he would even use the cast itself as a weapon. Cowboy Bob could only win the belt in the WWE. Cheaters, like [Pete Rose](#), [Barry Bonds](#), and [Lance Armstrong](#), will have their crowns removed after the fact if they are caught, at least, in more honest sports.

Is there a [parallel](#) in this “C/C” line of the passage? I think so. Perhaps the direct parallel to the “[crown](#)” is the Lord’s “[seal](#)” that we discussed in [19a](#). God seals his own people and rewards them with eternal life itself. But we can go backwards to [vv. 16-18](#) to see more. Vs. [16](#) is very similar to [23](#)’s controversies and quarrels. “[But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness.](#)” We’ve looked directly at the irreverent babble in the first letter and saw that it had much to do with fighting over OT stories and laws/doctrines. It is the [laws/doctrines](#) that I’m interested in this time.

Irreverence and ungodliness are a result of [breaking the law](#). Or, to put it in vs. 5 terms, breaking the “[rules](#).” That’s the parallel. Vs. [17](#) says, “[Their talk will spread like gangrene.](#)” Initially I thought this makes better sense of the soldier analogy, as gangrene often got into a battle wound and killed the soldier. This was reinforced by the names

Hymenaeus and Philetus, two more individuals causing trouble in the Ephesus church, which became the immediate reason Paul turned to Korah in that quotation.

But I think the athlete picture fits just as well. I may be stretching this one, and I'll own that, but **these two names** may **fit the idea of games and athletics**. **Hymenaeus** means Nuptial; Belonging to Marriage. In ancient Greece, marriages were arranged. When the guardian (*kyrios*) of the bride was ready to allow his daughter to marry, suitors would **compete against** each other for the daughter's hand in marriage. They would bring gifts or compete by song, dance, or **games**. **Philetus** means Beloved, Worthy of Love. That idea is obviously close to marriage. But I can't help but think of The Spaniard when became so adored and loved by all the people of the Roman Empire because he was unbeatable in the games. "**Are you not entertained?**" he would yell, as he defeated the most powerful foes in the arena, and the crowds only grew more infatuated with him.

But there's more than just my silly speculation about the names. These two men "**have swerved from the truth...**" (18). The word "**swerved**" (*astochēō*) is similar in meaning to **sin** (*hamartia*). It can mean "**miss the mark**." That idea originated in **archery**, and so we are back to games. But it

can also mean to **deviate** or depart. That takes us again back to the **rules**, which you must compete according to.

In their case, they were causing controversy over doctrine, particularly, the **resurrection** “**saying that the resurrection has already happened**” (18b). This clearly does not refer to Jesus’ resurrection, which of course had already happened. It must refer to the believer’s resurrection. These men were the first original **full-preterists**, the belief that even the second resurrection has happened. In order to do this, they must spiritualize and deny the bodily physical resurrection of the saints at the end of days. This is a topic that probably **deserves an entire sermon on its own**. Instead of that today, I’ll let Calvin speak, albeit without mincing words, for the entirety of the Christian tradition, which Tertullian long ago told us was a doctrine taken up early on (second cent.) by the Valentinian Gnostics,<sup>10</sup>

In doing this, they undoubtedly contrived a sort of **allegorical resurrection**, which has also been attempted in this age by some filthy dogs. By this trick Satan **overthrows that fundamental article** of our faith concerning the resurrection of the flesh. Being an old and worthless dream, and being so severely condemned by Paul, it ought to give

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<sup>10</sup> See **Tertullian**, *Prescriptions Against Heretics* 33.

us the less uneasiness. But when we learn that, from the very beginning of the gospel, *the faith of some was subverted*, such an example ought to excite us to diligence, that we may seize an early opportunity of driving away from ourselves and others so dangerous a plague; for, in consequence of the strong inclination of men to vanity, there is no absurdity so monstrous that there shall not be some men who shall lend their ear to it.<sup>11</sup>

The Apostle says they were **upsetting the faith of some**, and this is clearly one of those doctrines that was being quarreled about in the church. Chrysostom tells you why this matters so much.

If the resurrection is already past, not only do we suffer loss in being deprived of that great glory, but because judgment is taken away and retribution also. For if the resurrection is past, retribution also is past. The good therefore have reaped persecutions and afflictions, and **the wicked have not been punished**. On the contrary, they live in great pleasure. It would be better to say that there is no resurrection than that it is already past.

(**Chrysostom**, *Homilies on 2 Timothy 5*)<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Calvin, 225–226.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Gorday, *Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture NT 9. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 250–251.

## Farmer

This playing fast and loose with the Scripture was a game to these false teachers who did not know Christ. That fits very nicely with the athlete metaphor. But we have one more to look at—the farmer. “It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops” (2Tim 2:6).<sup>13</sup> It is interesting that crop language is used by Paul in other places to refer to the resurrection of Jesus and the saints. Christ is the “firstfruits” and we are the harvest that comes later. That makes for a logical segue from athletics to farming.

But the farming metaphor has the most explicit parallel of the three. It is found in vs. 15. “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” The connection is the worth “worker.” A worker who has no need to be ashamed is parallel with a hard-working farmer.

Could there be any relationship between a farmer and a workman ashamed? Joel 1:11 connects the two when the farmer’s crop is destroyed by his negligence. Another idea

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<sup>13</sup> Because the movement of the three goes from soldier to farmer, it is tempting to think of passages like Isaiah 2:4, “And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks” (cf. Joel 3:10; Micah 4:3). However, Paul is not giving successive stages that Timothy is to move through, but rather metaphors that occur simultaneously in the man of God. Nevertheless, it is an interesting correspondence.

comes farm ownership in the ancient world. It is estimated that 85-90% of all people worked on farms (that's very much like what it was in the States until the 20<sup>th</sup> century). However, in a city like Ephesus, it is almost a certainty that a farmer there would **not have owned** his own land.

Typically city residents, temples, or a city itself owned most of the outlying farm lands around a city. It can be estimated from the placement of boundary markers that have been uncovered that the temple of Artemis of Ephesus owned as much as 77,000 acres of rich farm lands extending up to thirty miles outside the temple's precincts (which was itself about a mile outside of Ephesus).<sup>14</sup>

This put the farmer as a kind of slave. One example of how there could be shame here comes from a section out of the Greek novel from the period entitled *Daphnis and Chloe*. Curiously, given what I said earlier about the names of the heretics, the father of Chloe (the girl) approached Lamon, the father of Daphnis (the boy) to **arrange a marriage** between their children. Both men worked small farmsteads. Lamon responds:

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<sup>14</sup> **Clinton E. Arnold**, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon.*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 486.

I'd be mad not to think it a great advantage to gain the friendship of your family, now that I'm an old man and need extra hands to get the work done. Besides, Chloe's a girl who's very much sought after, pretty and fresh and excellent in every way. But being a slave I can't make my own decisions about any member of my family. My master will have to be told of it and give his consent. So look here, let's put off the wedding until the autumn, for then he'll be here, according to reports that have been reaching us from town (3.31; Penguin trans.).

(Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe* 3.31)<sup>15</sup>

Not being able to make his own decisions would be contrasted with the farmer who owned his land and could. That could make one ashamed. But Paul takes this idea and moves it to the realm of the preacher “rightly handling the word of truth.” Given that the sword of the spirit is the word of God in Ephesians, this could correspond to the military analogy. However, think about Paul telling us about his and Apollo's work among the churches.

The Corinthian church also loved to argue, this time it was over who was a better “super-apostle.” So Paul responds, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the

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<sup>15</sup> In Ibid.

growth. So neither he who *plants* nor he who *waters* is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who *plants* and he who *waters* are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow *workers*. You are God's *field*" (1Cor 3:6-9). This is clearly a **farming analogy**. Starting churches from scratch, bringing people to Christ, establishing them in truth, growing them in grace, this is planting and watering. This is only done by handling the word of God rightly. Any misstep and the plant dies. Thus, there is in fact a deep relationship between these D, D' elements of the chapter. And this takes us to the heart of the chapter.

## The Trustworthy Saying

If a pastor is going to rightly divide the word of truth,<sup>16</sup> then he needs **understanding**. **Verse 7** takes us to the E, E' element: "Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you *understanding* in everything." Everything refers to the word

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<sup>16</sup> As an anecdote, one of my favorite books growing up was giving this title: *Rightly Dividing the Word* by Clarence Larkin. Ironically, he takes "dividing" to mean literally chopping it up, in his case, into "dispensations." Larkin was a Dispensationalist. Dividing here has the idea of chopping into little segmented bits, but rather cutting in a straight line (LSJ lexicon) or guiding the word of truth along a straight path (BDAG lexicon). The idea is about *interpreting* rightly, something I today believe Larkin was not so good at doing.

and what he needs to tell people. The parallel to understanding is **hearing** in **vs. 14b** (“**Keep on *hearing*, but do not *understand***” [Isa 6:9; cf. **Matt 13:13**]). The end of that verse says, “... **which does no good, but only ruins the *hearers*.**” One understands, the other only hears to his own ruin. All too typical of too many people (see Isa 6:9).

But **what does no good?** The F, F’ elements. **14a** says, “***Remind* them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words.**” It is **quarreling about words**, what we’ve already looked at, that leads to ruin. This “**reminding**” has its parallel in vs. 8’s “**remember.**” Remind. Remember. “***Remember* Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel.**” Resurrection. We looked at it last week and also today. Clearly, the heretics at Ephesus were not just tinkering with our resurrection; they had to have been playing around with His too. Otherwise, why does Paul need to have Timothy remember this and then remind others not to quarrel about words over it? Serious heresy is rarely just isolated to one doctrine. If it is true heresy, it always moves to the foundation.

Here is where it gets the **most practical**. Paul reminds Timothy that he himself is “**suffering.**” Timothy is to “**share**

in suffering as a good soldier.” Paul is suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But there’s something interesting here that could be related to a lot of what we have seen today. In **2Tim 4:17** Paul says something very curious. “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. So I was rescued *from the lion’s mouth*” (**2Tim 4:17**). Is the “lion’s mouth” merely a metaphor, like the one we find of Christ on the cross in Psalm 22? Or could it be more **literal**?

The official website of the Roman Colosseum tells us about the gladiator competitors that they were “**free Romans, slaves, condemned criminals, or prisoners of war.**”<sup>17</sup> Paul certainly fits that category. However, many have denied this was possible for Paul to have been put into the games in this way because he was a Roman citizen.<sup>18</sup> Now, it is important to know that the famous **Roman Colosseum** would not be built for another 10-15 years from when 2 Timothy was written. However, that does not mean there were not other theaters (“circuses”) for the same kinds

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<sup>17</sup> “**Rome Colosseum History**,” *The Colosseum in Rome*, <https://romecolosseumtickets.tours/colosseum-history-rome/>.

<sup>18</sup> For example, “His status as a Roman Citizen also spared him a painful and humiliating death in the Colosseum.” **Charles R. Swindoll**, *Swindoll’s Living Insights: New Testament Commentary 1 & 2 Timothy \* Titus*, Comments on 2 Tim 4:17-18 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 273.

of games. In fact, there were many. Furthermore, some has supposed that in fact Paul is telling us that he had been handed over to the gladiatorial games, but was miraculously spared by God, as he has saved him so many other times.<sup>19</sup> IVP's *Dictionary of New Testament Background* says this was a very real possibility.<sup>20</sup>

Imagine if this was the case, that Paul survived the games. That puts an even more epic spin on his enduring everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory (2Tim 2:10). This G, G' element has its parallel in vs. 12. "If we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us." Later on, Christians would be forced to deny Christ or face the games as sheep given to lions. This

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<sup>19</sup> For example, "The Colosseum was not yet built, but it is highly probable that in some of the circuses, of which there were several, St Paul was exposed to the wild beasts. The statement in 2 Tim. Iv. 17, seems to favour such a supposition. He had to stand in the midst of the crowded Amphitheatre alone. But he was not afraid or ashamed." W. R. Fremantle, *From Athens to Rome* (London, James Nisbet & Co, 1869), 90.

<sup>20</sup> "The apostle Paul himself may have experienced the arena if one interprets the passage in 2 Timothy 4:17, 'and I was delivered from the lion's mouth' (*kai errythēn ek stomatos leontos*) as a description of a deliverance from an actual lion. The line 'At my first answer' (*en tē prōtē mou apologia*, 2 Tim 4:16) suggests a setting not unlike that attested by other accounts of martyrdom trials in the arena. Moreover, the first part of the verse referring to one of the reasons for this ordeal, namely, 'that all the nations might hear' his preaching, tends to support the theory that it was a public event with a crowd." Michael S. Pucci, "Arenas," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 113–114.

we know for a fact. The point is, Timothy is to endure as his mentor did, even as Paul's mentor did, the Lord Jesus.

That takes us to [the heart of the passage](#), the trustworthy saying. “[For: If we have died with him, we will also live with him](#)” (11). The continuation of this saying is that if we endure, we will also reign with him, but if we deny him, he also will deny us. Life and resurrection vs. death and forsaking. All under the certain threat of suffering, and perhaps the imminent threat of dying in the arena.

This takes us [full circle to the Spaniard](#), Maximus Decimus Meridius, our soldier, our gladiator, our farmer. The movie ends, stunningly, with Maximus dying. As he moves in and out of consciousness in his final moments, we are taken from the arena to the [Elysium Fields](#), which he takes to be his home—his farm, where his wife and son beckon. Maximus did not succumb. Paul did not succumb. Timothy did not succumb. Jesus did not succumb. Many in our day have and are, at breakneck speed, as they throw off the shackles of organized religion and/or turn the back on Christ, on the resurrection, and on Christianity altogether.

[Those are the stakes](#). To win them, the church needs the single-minded determination of a soldier, the discipline of an athlete, and the hard-work of a farmer. Make it your goal

to make it to the end as a Veteran. Make it your goal to make your entire life a Tithe to the Lord. Make it your goal to do work at this to your Maximum ability. Maximus. Decimus. Meridius. And hold your church officers to this same high account. The stakes couldn't be higher. Only by fighting and winning and working can they be attained. Thankfully, those things are not up to you, ultimately. Hence, the center. They are up to the gospel and to a God who has granted you repentance and who will lead his people and his church into all understanding of the word so that they might persevere to the end.

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