

**THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD**  
Arlington Presbyterian Church (PCA)

***Intentional Disciplemaking***

2 Timothy 2:1-2 (587)

November 25, 2001

*You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.*

**Verse 1** is an intensely personal exhortation -***You therefore, my son.*** Paul's appeal to Timothy springs from what is said in the last verses of Chapter 1. Paul mentions two men who, along with others, had abandoned him. At the prospect of paying a price for their identification with Paul, they had deserted him. In **1:15** he reminds Timothy, *You are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.* The apostle contrasts these men with a faithful co-worker named Onesiphorus. Of this brother, Paul says in **1:16**, *he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chains.* Of course, both the deserters and the loyalist are mentioned that Timothy might be instructed. Here's the idea behind the word *therefore*. Timothy, there are those who, in the face of trial, abandon the gospel. There are also those who remain loyal under every circumstance. That you might avoid the former and imitate the latter ... ***my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.***

Negatively, *be strong* so you yourself will not be a casualty in the advance of the gospel. Back in the early 80's God used the book, *The Grace of God in the Gospel*, in a profound way in my life. Upon reading this little volume, I gladly and enthusiastically embraced the Reformed doctrine of salvation. Second to my conversion itself, that event was the most formative in terms of my theological development. The book was written by four Oxford undergraduates – John Cheeseman, Philip Gardner, Michael Sadgrove, and Tom Wright - office-holders in the Oxford Inter-Collegiate Christian Union. These young men argued that for spiritual renewal contemporary Christianity needs, above all, faith in the historic gospel (back cover). First published in 1972, the original work was revised and re-published in 1999 under the title, *Saving Grace*. The irony is this. John Cheeseman, Vicar of St. James' Church, Westgate, Kent, is the lone author. You see one of the other three still claims to be a Christian although he is a homosexual. One is so far left he now says that the reformation doctrine of justification is a mockery and distortion of biblical truth. The third guy has renounced the faith altogether (Jack Smith, 11/20/01). Timothy, *be strong* so you will not, at last, abandon the historic gospel.

Positively, *be strong* so you will unashamedly identify with the gospel and with those who proclaim it (1:8). Be strong so you might *join me in suffering for the gospel* (1:8). Be strong so you will *retain the standard of sound words* (1:13). Be strong so you will *guard the treasure entrusted to you* (1:14). What does it mean in this context to *be strong*?

**First**, I believe it means to possess and maintain an unshakable confidence in and adherence to apostolic doctrine; a death-defying passion for *the faith once for all delivered to the saints*. **Second**, it means to be diligent in the execution of one's ministry. I love to browse in the print shops in the mall. On several occasions I have noticed a poster-size print of a striking photograph of a stone lighthouse standing firm as it is pounded and engulfed by a huge wave. Some of you know the one I'm talking about. That's a great image of strength.

I would be the first to admit that living the Christian life involves, indeed, demands, a measure of personal resolve; a fixity of purpose; a holy determination. Three times in **Ephesians 6**, Paul says *stand firm (11)*, *stand firm (13)*, *stand firm (14)*. Sanctification is a process in which your renewed faculties – mind, will, and emotions – are active. However, verse 1 is no mere encouragement to Timothy to screw down his resolve or to dig deep and draw on his own inner resources. Paul is not suggesting that Timothy has within himself the necessary capacity, will, endurance, fortitude, discipline, and courage to do the great spiritual work of gathering and perfecting the saints. There is a resource outside of him upon which Timothy must draw.

**Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.** What does it mean to *be strong in grace*? Look back to **1:8**, *join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God*. **II Corinthians 12:9**, *And [God] has said to me, "My **grace** is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."* Jesus said, *"Without Me*

*you can do nothing” (John 15:5).* I think we must understand grace here as divine favor that enables the child of God to do that which he is called to do; to bear that which he is called to bear; to embrace and defend, without compromise, that which he knows to be true.

So when you are strong in grace you are possessed of a keen awareness of your own inadequacy to produce lasting spiritual fruit; an acknowledgment of your weaknesses coupled with confession of your sins (see **II Cor. 12:10b**). When you are strong in grace you will be much in prayer. **James 5:16b** says, *The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.* **Ephesians 3:20**, God is *able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all we ask or think.* When you are strong in grace you will obey out of simple courage.

Following verse 1 is a series of instructions for Timothy to follow in reliance upon divine grace. The first in **verse 2**, involves **discipleship** – that process by which mature believers in Jesus Christ help others to grow spiritually by mentoring them life-on-life. This great work is characterized by deliberately giving scheduled time to specific individuals to instruct and equip them for growth in Christ and ministry in the church.

**II Timothy 2:2** is one of my “life verses.” By that I mean that it has had a formative influence in my life. The application of the principles just mentioned has served to shape my priorities, schedule, praying, relationships, my goals,

and so on. II Timothy 2:2 lies behind the initiation and continuation of Evangelism Explosion here in this church. II Timothy 2:2 lies behind the development and execution of The PROGRAM and other equipping classes at APC. II Timothy 2:2 lies behind my ministry priorities for this entire decade. If considered carefully and applied responsibly this verse will indeed shape the thinking and lifestyle of everyone involved in ministry.

It is commonly assumed that Paul, during his first missionary journey, led the young Timothy to faith in Christ. Subsequently, Timothy served as Paul's apprentice, his protégé, his assistant. Paul was Timothy's father in the faith and also his mentor. Timothy is now the pastor of the church in Ephesus. The apostle is charging Timothy with teaching, or more accurately, "entrusting" to others what Paul had taught him. These others would, in turn, teach the same things to others still. A good way to understand this is to imagine a chain with this precious body of apostolic truth passing from one human link to another.

What is it Timothy is to pass on? ***The things which you have heard from me.*** In view is that body of truth which Paul preached and taught. Surely Timothy had heard Paul preach many times. He had often listened as his mentor opened the Scriptures to the people of God. He had taken note as Paul outlined the main tenets of the faith ***in the presence of many witnesses.***

“The witnesses testify to the “soundness” of those words and to the fact that those words are the truth of God that should be passed on” (Knight). Timothy can take great confidence in the consistency and transparency of the message. Paul reminded the Ephesian elders, *“I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you **publicly and from house to house**, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:20-21).*

For years, my dad was a member of the Masonic Lodge. He entered the Lodge when I was about ten years old. Buck Cothran, our neighbor and dear friend, was the “Big Kahuna” in the Lodge at that time. I remember those afternoons and evenings when daddy and Buck would sit together in the back yard next to the fence and study all the things daddy was supposed to know in order to be admitted. As a young boy I was curious. I asked questions. What are you and Buck doing? What is the Lodge? What do you do there? What are you learning? Can I see? And, you know, I never got an answer. That kind of secrecy engendered suspicion in a young boy’s mind from the start. If it’s good and lawful, why can’t my daddy tell me about it?

Beloved, Christianity is neither veiled in nor obscured by secrecy. There are no mystic goodies. Our most cherished ceremonies are open. Our book is available and we urge men to examine it. Our message is proclaimed openly. What we believe is articulated in books, on cassette tapes, TV, CDs, and the

Internet. But although open and available this body of truth is not common or cheap. Indeed the gospel in all its beauty is our most cherished treasure. It is to be passed from one man to another, one woman to another, one generation to the next with great care and precision. Paul instructs Timothy ...

***These entrust to faithful men.*** Paul is clearly telling Timothy to invest his discipling energies in men who have demonstrated themselves to be faithful and reliable. I believe in view here is the teacher-training ministry of the church. Why this qualification? By way of explanation let me suggest two things. **First**, the accurate and thorough transmission of truth takes time. Teaching others to teach is a time-intensive, labor-intensive process. It is a strategic initiative in the life of the church, not to be squandered, wasted on men of shallow commitment. **Second**, not everyone can be trusted with the ministry of the Word. God commands a measure of discrimination when it comes to evaluating, recruiting, training, and commissioning those who will communicate the Word of God to the people of God. The fact is that there are those who oppose the truth (**2:25**). There are those who *turn away from the truth* (**4:4**). There are those who will depreciate the truth (**4:3**). In other words, they will lower the value of the truth, lower its esteem, lower its importance. Such an approach is betrayed by phrases like, "Let's just love Jesus" or "You guys are too concerned about doctrine." There are those who *wander from the truth* (**2:18**). So negatively we entrust the gospel to men who will not oppose the truth, turn away from the truth, wander

from it, or depreciate it. Positively we entrust the gospel to men who will *handle accurately the word of truth (2:15)*.

Beloved, we're not filling ministry slots around here. Teaching is not a matter of volunteerism. Tom Browning is meeting with a class of seven men during the Sunday School hour teaching them to be teachers. Two things they have learned if they didn't already know them. First, teaching the Word is serious business. Second, teaching the Word takes gobs of time and a lot of work. Some time ago Gage Browning and Joe Huber taught I Samuel in the adult Sunday School. Few are aware that those young men prepared for two years before they stepped up to teach. They spent hours reading and listening to tapes to discover and perfect the main idea. They taught the book in 36 lessons to our senior high kids. They distilled those 36 down to 12 lessons. They wrote the lessons, had them critiqued, rewrote them, had the rewrites critiqued. After all that they had to teach them, out loud, to Tom Browning before they could teach them to you.

Not only must prospective teachers be reliable but they must also show promise in terms of their ability to disciple others. ***Who will be able to teach others also.*** A word to teachers. Your responsibility is never limited to the raw communication of truth. I pray that this sermon be a point of departure in your ministry. A true teacher will seek to extend his ministry beyond himself or herself. He will, in the process of teaching, be training others to do the same.

That's ministry with a discipleship mentality. We have expounded this verse with its most immediate application in view – the teaching ministry of the church. To limit verse 2 to preachers and other vocational ministers is to wrongly shut out the vast majority of saints which constitutes the body of Christ and who also should apply the principles from II Timothy 2:2.

Let's take elders for example. In **I Timothy 3:2** Paul includes the phrase *able to teach* as a qualification for an elder. In **Titus 1:9** he requires that the elder *be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict*. This certainly raises the bar in regard to the qualifications for elders. The expectation is that elders will be teaching. Of course, not every elder can stand up in front of 50 or 500 people in the context of Sunday School or public worship but every elder ought to be discipling others in a context which fits his giftedness and personality.

Furthermore, every believer, in the power of the Holy Spirit, is to be intentionally engaged in making disciples. **Matthew 28:19-20**, “*Go therefore and make disciples ...*” Philip Towner writes, “Timothy, like every other minister and every other believer, is a link in the chain of redemption. Each believer has received the gospel as a stewardship. And [this stewardship] carries the obligation to pass it on similarly to others (**I Thess. 1:6-8; I Pet. 3:15**). Through each believer the gospel may be spread far and wide in each generation. This part of the task begins in the home, where children may learn the Bible and how to live according

to biblical principles taught and demonstrated by godly parents (**Deut. 6:7-9; Eph. 6:4**). It continues as mature Christian friends pass on what they have learned about godly living to friends who are younger in the faith. The church, through its teachers (qualified to teach others), passes the faith from one generation on to the next, continuing the evangelistic mission” (p.170).

Most of you know and love the apostolic message of the cross. You have listened to it on tape. You have heard it taught in Sunday School classes, Bible studies, and in Care Groups. You have read Christian books. You have attended Christian schools and colleges. You have listened to sermons by the thousands over ten, twenty, thirty, forty years. Not a few have invested thousands of hours in Bible Study Fellowship. You have attended conferences and seminars. You have engaged in personal Bible study. Here’s my question. What have you done with this accumulated treasure? I read that over the holidays – Thanksgiving through New Years – every American will gain an average of seven pounds. Similarly, we have gorged ourselves on apostolic truth. We suffer from information obesity. We are the spiritual counterparts of the man in Luke 11 who had to build bigger barns for all his crops. He simply didn’t know what to do with all that he had stockpiled. We are like so many Silas Marners, miserly hoarding away the sparkling, golden gospel coins.

My exhortation to each of you this morning is to personally and intentionally *entrust these things to others who will be able to teach others also.*

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### **Why this qualification?**

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