

Unbroken

The unbroken chain of the Gospel. Here we are some 2000 years after Christ's ministry upon this earth and the Gospel message is still being proclaimed!

"The Christian Church is dependent on an unbroken chain of teachers." (Barclay)

You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ² What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

³ Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in the concerns of civilian life; he seeks to please the commanding officer. ⁵ Also, if anyone competes as an athlete, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶ The hardworking farmer ought to be the first to get a share of the crops. ⁷ Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. 2 Timothy 2:1-7 (CSB)

Last week: Be Faithful to God's Word. Be Faithful to God's Servants.

Paul is reflecting on a legacy. Like any leader who cares about those under his care, he is concerned for their future when he is gone....

- Ministers, serve the Lord but we help direct & refocus our flock on the Lord, rather than on ourselves.
- So what does that look like? As a leader in the church, an Apostle in Paul's case, how does he take the focus off of himself and back on Christ?
 - By reminding Timothy of his mission. His Purpose. The purpose of the Gospel!

We are to preserve & pass on God's truth.

Preserving God's Truth.

- Spoke about this last week on being "loyal" or "Faithful" to God's word.

Originally I worded this "Pass on God's Truth."

- Words matter! That meant we didn't want God's truth!
 - Nah, I'm good. Gonna take a PASS on this one... OOPS!
- If grammar is important how much more important are the words that contain the teachings of Christ? The Bible.

Passing on God's Truth.

"from Christ to Paul, from Paul to Timothy, from Timothy to 'faithful men', and from 'faithful men' to 'others also'" (Stott)

- Here was the pattern Paul spoke of
 - Jesus entrusted Paul with the Gospel teachings
 - Paul entrusted Timothy with the Gospel teachings
 - Timothy is to entrust others with the Gospel teachings
 - They are to entrust others with the Gospel teachings
 - Of course Christ, Paul, & now Timothy were passing on God's truth to more than just 1 person...
- Discipleship is not discipleship if it ends with us, or even the person we tell. God's truth must be passed on until Christ returns.

Example: Olympic torch or baton on a track team.

We have an obligation to pass on the Gospel to the next generation! To leave the chain unbroken until our Lord returns!

Application:

"Reception of the faith is the privilege of the Christian; transmission of the faith is the responsibility of the Christian." (Barclay)

- We all have an opportunity to disciple someone, no matter how briefly.
 - Kids
 - Family
 - Sunday school
 - Random stranger when you find their disc in a pond while playing disc golf.
 - He offered me a reward but I quoted him Luke 6:31 *“Do for others what you would want them to do for you.”*
 - He never responded after that but I hope I planted a seed.

Sharing the Gospel at the Park this afternoon. Meet at 4:45.

Raise your children in a Godly home! Equip them!

Study God’s word, dig deeper into it than a simple 1 hour a week.

Be a “Faithful Man” & seek God’s understanding!

It’s about priorities...

“Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in the concerns of civilian life; he seeks to please the commanding officer. ⁵Also, if anyone competes as an athlete, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶The hardworking farmer ought to be the first to get a share of the crops.” V.3-6

- Where are your priorities?
 - When you really care about something, you stay focused on that task. You aren’t swayed.
- Soldier – Focus
- Athlete – Discipline
- Farmer – Hard working

- We need more churches, more church members, that are this way also.
 - Who spend less time on Facebook/Netflix or in their hobbies & more time studying & passing on God's word to others.

CAST VISION about what the church, community, would look like if passionate Christians would hold on & pass on God's truth!

- God is already honoring some of your efforts when you are inviting your friends and family!
- Keep praying for them. Keep modeling what it means to be a Christian.

You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ² What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

³ Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in the concerns of civilian life; he seeks to please the commanding officer. ⁵ Also, if anyone competes as an athlete, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶ The hardworking farmer ought to be the first to get a share of the crops. ⁷ Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. 2 Timothy 2:1-7 (CSB)

We are to preserve & pass on God's truth

The Steward (2 Tim. 2:1–2)

The ministry is not something we get for ourselves and keep to ourselves. We are stewards of the spiritual treasure God has given us. It is our responsibility to guard the deposit and then invest it in the lives of others. They, in turn, are to share the Word with the next generation of believers.

It is important that we get our original treasure from the Word of God, and not from the ideas and philosophies of men. We do not test modern teachers by their popularity, education, or skill. We test them by the Word of God, and particularly the doctrines of grace as given by Paul. It is not we who examine Paul to see if he is right; it is Paul who examines us!

It takes strength to teach the Word of God. We must dig out of the rich mines of Scripture the “gold, silver, precious stones” that are hidden there (see Prov. 2:1–10; 3:13–15; 8:10–21; 1 Cor. 3:10–23). This strength can only come from God’s grace. The secret of Paul’s great ministry was the grace of God (1 Cor. 15:10).

The ability to study, understand, and teach the Word of God is a gift of God’s grace. “Apt to teach” is one of God’s requirements for the pastor (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:24). “Apt to teach” implies apt to learn; so a steward must also be a diligent student of the Word of God.

The Soldier (2 Tim. 2:3–4, 8–13)

Paul often used military illustrations in his letters. This is not surprising since he lived in a military state and was in prison himself. He described in these verses the characteristics of a “good soldier of Jesus Christ.”

He endures hardship (v. 3). Many people have the idea that the ministry is a soft job. Preachers are often the butt of jokes that suggest they are lazy and should be ashamed of accepting their salaries. But a dedicated Christian minister is in a battle that requires spiritual endurance (see Eph. 6:10ff).

He avoids worldly entanglements (v. 4). He is totally committed to his Commanding Officer, the One who enlisted him. In our case, this is Jesus Christ. I recall a story about a Civil War soldier who happened to be a watchmaker. One day the bugle sounded and the men were told to break camp. “But I can’t go now!” the soldier complained. “I have a dozen watches to repair!”

It is sometimes necessary for a pastor, or a pastor’s wife, to be employed because their church is not able to support them. This is a sacrifice on their part and an investment in the work. But a pastor who is fully supported should not get involved in sidelines that divide his interest and weaken his ministry. I have met pastors who spend more time on their real estate ventures than on their churches. Our purpose is to please the Lord, not ourselves.¹

1. Handing on the Truth (verses 1, 2)

The first chapter ended with Paul’s sorrowful reference to the widespread defection among Christians in the Roman province of Asia (1:15). Onesiphorus and his household seem to have been the outstanding exception. Now Paul urges Timothy that he too, in the midst of the general landslide, must stand his ground. It is the first of several similar exhortations in the letter, beginning *su oun* or *su de* meaning ‘you therefore’ or ‘but you’, which summon Timothy to resist the prevailing mood. Timothy had been called to responsible leadership in the church not only in spite of his natural diffidence but in the very area where the apostle’s authority was being repudiated. It is as if Paul says to him: ‘Never mind what other people may be thinking or saying or doing. Never mind how weak and shy you yourself may feel. As for you, Timothy, be strong!’

Of course if his exhortation had stopped there, it would have been futile, even absurd. He might as well have told a snail to be quick or a horse to fly as command a man as timid as Timothy to be strong. But Paul’s call to fortitude is Christian not stoical. It is not a summons to Timothy to be strong in himself—to set his jaw and grit his teeth—but to ‘be inwardly strengthened’ by means of ‘the grace that is in Christ Jesus’. NEB expands the sentence thus: ‘Take strength from the grace of God which is ours in Christ Jesus.’ **Timothy is to find his resources for ministry not in his own nature but in Christ’s grace. It is not only for salvation that we are dependent on grace (1:9), but for service also.**

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 2, pp. 244–245). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Paul proceeds to indicate the kind of ministry for which Timothy will need to strengthen himself by Christ's grace. So far he has been exhorted to hold the faith and guard the deposit (1:13, 14). He is to do more than preserve the truth, however; he is also to pass it on. If the disloyalty of the Asian church made it imperative that Timothy should guard the truth with loyalty, the approaching death of the apostle made it equally imperative that Timothy should make arrangements for the handing down of the truth intact to the next generation. In this transmission of truth from hand to hand Paul envisages four stages.

First, the faith has been entrusted to Paul by Christ. This is why he has called it 'my deposit' (1:12). It is his by deposit, not by invention. As an apostle of Jesus Christ he insists that his gospel is 'not man's gospel', whether his own composition or somebody else's. Nor is he relying purely on human tradition. On the contrary, he could write: 'I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ' (Gal. 1:11, 12).

Secondly, what has been entrusted to Paul by Christ Paul in his turn has entrusted to Timothy. So 'my deposit' becomes virtually 'your deposit', and 'what has been entrusted to me' (1:12) is now 'the truth that has been entrusted to you' (1:14). This deposit consists of certain 'sound words' which Timothy has heard from Paul's own lips. The exact expression 'you have heard from me' (1:13 *par' emou ekousas*) is repeated in 2:2, though now with the addition that Timothy has heard it 'before many witnesses'. The aorist tense would seem to refer not to a single public occasion on which Timothy heard the apostle's teaching—such as his baptism or ordination—but rather to the totality of his instruction over the years. And the reference to the many witnesses shows that the apostolic faith was not a secret tradition handed on privately to Timothy (such as the Gnostics were claiming), whose authenticity there was no means of testing, but a public instruction, whose truth was guaranteed by the many witnesses who had heard it and who could therefore check Timothy's teaching against the apostle's.

This statement of Paul's became important in the following century when Gnosticism had grown and spread. For example, in chapter 25 of his *Prescriptions against Heretics* (c. AD 200) Tertullian of Carthage was particularly writing against Gnostics who claimed both to have had private revelations of their own and to possess secret traditions handed down from the apostles. He would not allow that the apostles had 'entrusted some things openly to all and some things secretly to a few'. For (he argued) in appealing to Timothy to guard the deposit 'there is no hinting at a hidden doctrine, but a command not to admit any but the teaching which he had heard from Paul himself and (I think) openly—"before many witnesses" as he says'.

Thirdly, what Timothy has heard from Paul he is now to 'entrust to faithful men', of whom there are evidently some left among the many deserters of Asia. The men Paul has in mind must be primarily ministers of the word, whose chief function is to teach, Christian elders whose responsibility it would be—like the Jewish elders of the synagogue—to preserve the tradition. Such Christian elders are 'God's stewards', as Paul has recently written to Titus (1:7), because both God's household and God's truth are committed to their trust. And the fundamental requirement in stewards is trustworthiness (1 Cor. 4:1, 2). They must be 'faithful men'.

Fourthly, such men must be the sort of men who (as the relative *hoitines* should be translated) 'will be able to teach others also'. The ability or competence which Timothy must look for in such men will consist partly in their integrity or faithfulness of character already mentioned and partly in their facility for teaching. They must be *didaktikoi*, 'apt teachers', a word Paul has used of candidates for the ministry in 1 Timothy 3:2 and will use again later in this chapter (2:24).

Here, then, are the four stages in the handing on of the truth, which Paul envisages: from Christ to Paul, from Paul to Timothy, from Timothy to 'faithful men', and from 'faithful men' to 'others

also'. This is the true 'apostolic succession'. Certainly it would involve men, a line of 'faithful men' at that, but the succession from the apostles is to be more in the message itself than in the men who teach it. It is to be a succession of apostolic tradition rather than of apostolic ministry, authority or order, a transmission of the apostles' doctrine handed down unchanged from the apostles to subsequent generations, and passed from hand to hand like the Olympic torch. This apostolic tradition, 'the good deposit', is now to be found in the New Testament. Speaking ideally, 'Scripture' and 'tradition' should be interchangeable terms, for what the church hands down from generation to generation should be the biblical faith, no more and no less. And the biblical faith is the apostolic faith.

In the rest of this second chapter of his letter Paul enlarges on the teaching ministry to which Timothy has been called. He illustrates it by using six vivid metaphors. The first three are already favourite images with Paul—the soldier, the athlete and the farmer. He has made use of them several times in former letters to enforce a wide variety of truths. Here they all emphasize that Timothy's work will be strenuous, involving both labour and suffering.

2. Metaphor I: The Dedicated Soldier (verses 3, 4)

Paul's prison experiences had given him ample opportunity to watch Roman soldiers and to meditate on the parallels between the soldier and the Christian. In earlier letters he has referred to the warfare with principalities and powers in which the Christian soldier is engaged, the armour which he must put on and the weapons which he must use (Eph. 6:10 ff.; 1 Tim. 1:18; 6:12; 2 Cor. 6:7; 10:3–5; cf. Rom. 6:13, 14). But here the 'good soldier of Christ Jesus' is so called because he is a dedicated man, who shows his dedication in his willingness both to suffer and to concentrate.

Soldiers on active service do not expect a safe or easy time. They take hardship, risk and suffering as a matter of course. These things are part and parcel of a soldier's calling. As Tertullian put it in his *Address to Martyrs*: 'No soldier comes to the war surrounded by luxuries, nor goes into action from a comfortable bedroom, but from the makeshift and narrow tent, where every kind of hardness and severity and unpleasantness is to be found.' Similarly, the Christian should not expect an easy time. If he is loyal to the gospel, he is sure to experience opposition and ridicule. He must 'share in suffering' with his comrades-in-arms.

The soldier must be willing to concentrate as well as to suffer. When on active service he does not 'get himself entangled in business' (JBP). On the contrary, he frees himself from civilian affairs, in order to give himself to soldiering and so satisfy his superior officers or 'be wholly at his commanding officer's disposal' (JBP). As E. K. Simpson expresses it, 'the spectacle of military discipline furnished a grand lesson of wholeheartedness'.² So in the Second World War people frequently said to each other with a wry smile 'there's a war on'—a watchword sufficient to justify any austerity, self-denial or abstention from innocent activities because of the current emergency.

The Christian, who is intended to live in the world and not contract out of it, cannot of course avoid ordinary duties at home, at work and in the community. Indeed as a Christian he should be outstandingly conscientious in doing and not dodging them. Nor should he forget, as Paul reminded Timothy in his first letter, either that 'everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving' or that 'God . . . richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy' (1 Tim. 4:4; 6:17). So what is forbidden the good soldier of Jesus Christ is not all 'secular' activities, but rather 'entanglements' which, though they may be perfectly innocent in themselves, may hinder him from fighting Christ's battles. This counsel applies specially to the Christian minister or pastor. He is called to devote himself to teaching and tending Christ's flock, and there

are other Scriptures besides this one to say that if possible he should not have the additional burden of having to get his living in some ‘secular’ employment.

It is true that the apostle himself had often earned his keep by his tent-making. Yet he made it plain that in his case the reason was personal and exceptional, namely to ‘make the gospel free of charge’ and so put no possible ‘obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ’ (1 Cor. 9:18, 12). He still asserted the principle for himself and for every minister, by command of the Lord, that ‘those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel’ (1 Cor. 9:14). Indeed, he clearly expected this to be the general rule. And this needs to be remembered in our day when ‘auxiliary’, ‘supplementary’ and ‘part-time’ ministries are increasing, in which the pastor continues his trade or profession and exercises his ministry in his spare time. Such ministries can hardly be said to contravene Scripture. Yet they are difficult to reconcile with the apostle’s injunction to avoid entanglements. In the Church of England service for the ordination of presbyters the Bishop exhorts the candidates in these words: ‘Consider how studious ye ought to be in reading and learning the Scriptures ... and for this selfsame cause how ye ought to forsake and set aside (as much as you may) all worldly cares and studies, ... give yourselves wholly to this Office, ... apply yourselves wholly to this one thing, and draw all your cares and studies this way.’

The application of this verse is wider than to pastors, however. Every Christian is in some degree a soldier of Christ, even if he is as timid as Timothy. For, whatever our temperament, we cannot avoid the Christian conflict. And if we are to be good soldiers of Jesus Christ, we must be dedicated to the battle, committing ourselves to a life of discipline and suffering, and avoiding whatever may ‘entangle’ us and so distract us from it.

3. Metaphor II: The Law-Abiding Athlete (verse 5)

Paul now turns from the image of the Roman soldier to that of the competitor in the Greek games. In no athletic contest of the ancient world (any more than of the modern) was a competitor giving a random display of strength or skill. Every sport had its rules, always for the contest itself and sometimes for the preparatory training as well. Every event had its prize also, and the prizes awarded at the Greek games were evergreen wreaths, not gold medals or silver trophies. But no athlete, however brilliant, was ‘crowned’ unless he had competed ‘according to the rules’. ‘No rules, no wreath’ was the order of the day.

The Christian life is regularly likened in the New Testament to a race, not in the sense that we are competing against each other (though we are to ‘outdo one another in showing honour’, Rom. 12:10), but in other ways, in the strenuous self-discipline of training (1 Cor. 9:24–27), in laying aside every hindrance (Heb. 12:1, 2) and here in keeping the rules.

We are to run the Christian race *nomimōs*, ‘lawfully’. In spite of the strange teaching of the so-called ‘new morality’, which insists that the category of law has been abolished by Christ, the Christian is under obligation to live ‘lawfully’, to keep the rules, to obey God’s moral laws. True, he is not ‘under law’ as a way of salvation, to commend him to God, but he is as a guide to conduct. So far from abolishing his law God first sent his Son to die for us ‘in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us’, and now sends his Spirit to live in us and to write his law in our hearts! (Rom. 8:3, 4; Je. 31:33). Further, there is no crown otherwise, not of course because our law-abiding could ever justify us, but rather because without it we give evidence that we have never been justified.

The context requires that competing ‘according to the rules’ has a wider application than to our moral conduct, however. Paul is describing Christian service, not just Christian life. He seems

to be saying that rewards for service depend on faithfulness. The Christian teacher must teach the truth, building with solid materials on the foundation of Christ, if his work is to endure and not be burned up (*cf.* 1 Cor. 3:10–15). So Timothy must faithfully pass on the deposit to faithful men. Only if, like Paul, he perseveres to the end, so that he too fights the good fight, finishes the race and keeps the faith, can he expect on the last day to receive that most coveted of all wreaths, ‘the crown of righteousness’ (2 Tim. 4:7, 8).

4. Metaphor III: The Hardworking Farmer (verse 6)

If the athlete must play fair, the farmer must work hard. He ‘toils’ at his job, as the verb indicates. Hard work is indeed indispensable to good farming. This is particularly so in developing countries before mechanization arrives. In such circumstances successful farming depends as much on sweat as on skill. However poor the soil, inclement the weather, or disinclined the farmer, he must keep at his work. Having put his hand to the plough, he must not look back. Bishop Moule writes of ‘the strenuous and prosaic toil’ of the farmer. Unlike the soldier and the athlete the farmer’s life is ‘totally devoid of excitement, remote from all glamour of peril and of applause’.¹

Yet the first share of the crops goes to the hardworking farmer. He deserves it. His good yield is due as much to his toil and perseverance as to anything else. That is why a sluggard never makes a good farmer, as the book of Proverbs insists. He always loses his harvest, either because he is asleep when he ought to be reaping, or because he was too lazy to plough the previous autumn, or because he has allowed his fields to become overgrown with nettles and thorns (Pr. 10:5; 20:4; 24:30, 31).

To what kind of harvest is the apostle referring? Two applications are more obviously biblical than others.

First, holiness is a harvest. True, it is ‘the fruit (or ‘harvest’) of the Spirit’, in that the Spirit is himself the chief farmer who produces a good crop of Christian qualities in the believer’s life. But we have our part to play. We are to ‘walk by the Spirit’ and ‘sow to the Spirit’ (Gal. 5:16; 6:8), following his promptings and disciplining ourselves, if we would reap the harvest of holiness. Many Christians are surprised that they are not noticeably growing in holiness. Is it that we are neglecting to cultivate the field of our character? ‘Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap’ (Gal. 6:7). As Bishop Ryle emphasizes again and again in his great book entitled *Holiness*, there are ‘no gains without pains’. For example:

‘I will never shrink from declaring my belief that there are no “spiritual gains without pains”. I should as soon expect a farmer to prosper in business who contented himself with sowing his fields and never looking at them till harvest, as expect a believer to attain much holiness who was not diligent about his Bible-reading, his prayers, and the use of his Sundays. Our God is a God who works by means, and He will never bless the soul of that man who pretends to be so high and spiritual that he can get on without them.’

As Paul puts it here, it is ‘the hardworking farmer’ who has the first share of the crop. For holiness is a harvest.

Secondly, the winning of converts is a harvest too. ‘The harvest is plentiful,’ Jesus said, referring to the many who are waiting to hear and receive the gospel (Mt. 9:37; *cf.* Jn. 4:35; Rom. 1:13). Now in this harvest it is of course ‘God who gives the growth’ (1 Cor. 3:6, 7). But again we have no liberty to be idle. Further, both the sowing of the good seed of God’s word and the reaping

of the harvest are hard work, especially when the labourers are few. Souls are hardly won for Christ, not by the slick, automatic application of a formula, but by tears and sweat and pain, especially in prayer and in sacrificial personal friendship. Again, it is ‘the hardworking farmer’ who can expect good results.

This notion that Christian service is hard work is so unpopular in some happy-go-lucky Christian circles today that I feel the need to underline it. I have already mentioned that the verb signifies to ‘toil’. Arndt and Gingrich say that it means first of all to ‘become weary, tired’ and so to ‘work hard, toil, strive, struggle’. Both the noun (*kopos*) and the verb (*kopiaō*) were favourite words with Paul, and it may be healthy for us to see what strong exertion he believed to be necessary in Christian service.

It goes without saying that the word can be used of manual labour, and Paul applied it to his tent-making. ‘We labour,’ he could write, ‘working with our own hands’ (1 Cor. 4:12; cf. Eph. 4:28; 1 Thes. 4:11). But in his view spiritual work involved exertion too. He was quick to recognize thoroughness in others and sent special greetings at the end of his Roman letter to ‘Mary who has worked hard among you’ and to ‘the beloved Persis who has worked hard in the Lord’ (Rom. 16:6, (12b)). Not that Paul expected more of others than he was prepared to give himself. His exertions for the gospel were phenomenal. He could write of ‘labours, watching, hunger’ because, like his Master before him, he was often too busy to sleep or to eat, and could claim in respect of the other apostles, ‘I worked harder than any of them’ (2 Cor. 6:5; 1 Cor. 15:10; cf. Gal. 4:11; Phil. 2:16). If we were to press him about the nature of this toil, I think he would reply in terms of those two apostolic priorities ‘prayer and ... the ministry of the word’ (Acts 6:4). For he alluded in his first letter to Timothy to those elders ‘who labour in preaching and teaching’ (1 Tim. 5:17), and described to the Colossians his ‘toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me’ (Col. 1:29–2:1; cf. 1 Tim. 4:10) in a context which seems to refer to the prayer-battle in which he was engaged on their behalf.

The blessing, of God rested upon the ministry of the apostle Paul in quite exceptional measure. No doubt many explanations of this could be given. But I find myself wondering if we attribute it sufficiently to the zeal and zest, the almost obsessional devotion, with which he gave himself to the work. He gave and did not count the cost; he fought and did not heed the wounds; he toiled and did not seek for rest; he laboured and asked for no reward except the joy of doing his Lord’s will. And God prospered his efforts. Again, it is ‘the hardworking farmer’ who gets a good crop.

So far, then, we have looked at the first three metaphors with which Paul illustrates the duties of the Christian worker. By them he has isolated three aspects of wholeheartedness which should be found in Timothy, and in all those who like Timothy seek to pass on to others ‘the good deposit’ they have themselves received: the dedication of a good soldier, the law-abiding obedience of a good athlete and the painstaking labour of a good farmer. Without these we cannot expect results. There will be no victory for the soldier unless he gives himself to his soldiering, no wreath for the athlete unless he keeps the rules, and no harvest for the farmer unless he toils at his farming.

5. The Way to Understanding (verse 7)

This verse concludes the first paragraph of the chapter. There is an important biblical balance here. If Timothy is to know and understand the truth, not least as expressed in the metaphors Paul has just employed, two processes will be necessary, the one human and the other divine. Timothy himself must ‘think over’ or ‘reflect on’ (NEB) the apostle’s teaching, listening to it carefully and applying his mind to it. For then the Lord will grant him understanding in everything. According

to this better text, which the RSV follows, what Paul here expresses is a promise, and not merely a wish.

There are at least two important implications of this combination of human study and divine illumination for anybody who wants to inherit the promised gift of understanding from the Lord.

First, if we are to receive understanding from the Lord, we must consider what *the apostle* is saying. This is a good example of Paul's self-conscious apostolic authority. He commands Timothy to ponder his teaching and promises that the Lord will grant him 'understanding in everything' if he does so. He sees nothing anomalous about claiming that his teaching as an apostle merits careful study, or that it can be interpreted by the Lord alone, or that this is the way for Timothy to grow in understanding. It is clear evidence that Paul believed his teaching to be not his own but the Lord's. Indeed, in the following verses, almost imperceptibly, he equates 'my gospel' (8) with 'the word of God' (9).

Secondly, if we are to receive understanding from the Lord, we must *consider* what the apostle is saying. Some Christians never get down to any serious Bible study. The reason may of course be purely 'carnal', namely that they are too lazy. Alternatively, it may be 'spiritual' (though I fear I would have to call it 'pseudo-spiritual'), namely that they believe understanding will come to them from the Holy Spirit and not from their own studies (which is a totally false antithesis). So all they do is to skim through some Bible verses in a haphazard and desultory fashion, hoping (and even praying) that the Holy Spirit will show them what it all means. But they do not obey the apostle's command, 'Think over what I say.'

Others are very good at Bible study. They are 'hardworking farmers', as it were. They use their minds and grapple with the text of Scripture. They compare versions, consult concordances and pore over commentaries. But they forget that it is the Lord alone who imparts understanding, and that he imparts it as a gift.

So we must not divorce what God has joined together. For the understanding of Scripture a balanced combination of thought and prayer is essential. We must do the considering, and the Lord will do the giving of understanding.²

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. (2:1)

As mentioned in the Introduction and the previous chapters of this commentary, Timothy was facing a time of spiritual vacillation and weakness. He may have been questioning his calling or his gifts or the sufficiency of God's provision. He was mired in difficulties of some sort and could not extricate himself. Whatever the particulars, Paul realized that his son in the faith needed "to kindle afresh the gift of God which" was in him (2 Tim. 1:6). As we noted in the last chapter, he did not need more from God but needed to use, with commitment and confidence, the divine provisions he already possessed. He needed to remember and to exercise the "power and love and discipline" (v. 7) that the Holy Spirit had provided him and provides every believer. He needed to discard his being ashamed of "the testimony of the Lord" and to be willing to join Paul

² Stott, J. R. W. (1973). [*Guard the Gospel the message of 2 Timothy*](#) (pp. 48–60). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

in “suffering for the gospel according to the power of God” (v. 8). He needed, like the apostle, to be “convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day” (v. 12), to “retain the standard of sound words which [he had] heard from [Paul], in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus” (v. 13), to avoid faithless church members such as Phygelus and Hermogenes, and to identify with faithful believers such as Onesiphorus and those in his household (vv. 15–16).

Summing up that counsel, Paul said, “**You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.**” The verb **be strong** is an imperative, making it a command. Yet it is a command tempered by Paul’s deep love for Timothy, his **son**. There was tenderness in Paul’s heart because there is tenderness in God’s heart. Even the Lord’s strongest commands are given in love. He admonishes His children firmly but lovingly, and that is the way Paul admonished his spiritual **son** Timothy. Because Timothy had “sincere faith” and was nourished in that faith by his godly mother and grandmother (1:5), because he was specially gifted by God and ordained by the laying on of Paul’s hands (v. 6) and the hands of the Ephesian elders (1 Tim. 4:14), and because of the abundant resources mentioned in the remainder of chapter 1, Timothy had no reason for not being **strong**. Paul was saying to Timothy, “My son, the Lord’s work in Ephesus depends on you, its divinely appointed and divinely endowed minister.” The effectiveness of his ministry depended not simply in his *having* that call and those resources but in his faithfully *using* them in God’s power and to God’s glory.

It is an amazing paradox, but fully biblical, that, although God is sovereign and all-powerful, He nevertheless entrusts His adopted children with propagating the saving gospel of His true Son, Jesus Christ.

The verb **be strong** is also passive, however, indicating that the source of Timothy’s strength was not in himself but **in the grace that is in Christ Jesus**. A somewhat better rendering would be, “by *means* of **the grace that is in Christ Jesus**. Just as we are saved solely “by grace... through faith; and that not of [ourselves, but by] the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8), we also are kept saved by the grace of God, who “is faithful and righteous [to continue] to forgive us our sins and [to continue] to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Our only effective spiritual strength is “in the Lord, and in the strength of His might” (Eph. 6:10). We build ourselves up in the “most holy faith” by “praying in the Holy Spirit” and keeping ourselves “in the love of God” (Jude 20–21).

God’s continuing **grace** in the lives of believers operates in justification and sanctification, in forgiveness and in holiness, and in His grace applied to our service. **The same grace that forgives us and makes us holy is the grace that empowers us. Because we belong to Christ, we are continually in the sphere of grace. But to enjoy the sphere of blessing, we must live in the sphere of obedience.**

In 2 Timothy 2:2–6, Paul presents four key elements of a strong, obedient, spiritual life, using the vivid analogies of teacher (v. 2), soldier (vv. 3–4), athlete (v. 5), and farmer (v. 6).

THE TEACHER

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. (2:2)

The first metaphor is that of a teacher teaching a teacher, who, in turn, teaches other teachers, who then teach still other teachers. Although Paul mentions only four generations of teachers, the idea is that of a continuing process.

The New Testament neither teaches nor supports the idea of apostolic succession. But it does clearly teach, in this passage and elsewhere, that the gospel is to be promulgated from generation to generation. Jesus, of course, was the Master Teacher. He taught the apostles, who then taught others, who taught others, who are still teaching others, and so on throughout the church age. William Barclay comments, “The teacher is a link in the living chain which stretches unbroken from this present moment back to Jesus Christ. The glory of teaching is that it links the present with the earthly life of Jesus Christ” (*The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957], 182). In every generation, God has raised up new links in this living chain of **faithful men** to pass on the good news of Jesus Christ to the people of their day.

John ends his gospel by stating that “there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which were written” (John 21:25). Luke was not an apostle but was a close associate of apostles, so that much of what we know of the Lord’s earthly ministry and of the apostles’ ministry in the early church we know from Luke’s Spirit-guided hand. In the book of Acts, Luke begins by saying, “The first account [the gospel of Luke] I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when He was taken up” (Acts 1:1–2). Like John, he reports that what is recorded accounts only for those things “that Jesus *began* to do and teach” [emphasis added] until the Ascension. Just before He ascended, He told the awaiting disciples on the Mount of Olives, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

That evening, the Eleven returned to the Upper Room where they were staying and, under the Lord’s guidance, chose Matthias to replace Judas (vv. 21–26). Some years later, Christ personally and directly called Paul to be the thirteenth apostle (See Acts 9:3–20), “one untimely born,” whom he himself considered to be “the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (1 Cor. 15:8–9). But, by God’s sovereign grace and choice, he was as fully an apostle as the others (See, e.g., Rom. 1:1, 11:13; 1 Cor. 9:1).

The apostles, some for only a brief time before they were martyred, proclaimed the gospel they had received from Christ to other faithful men—prophets, elders, deacons, and many others—among whom was Timothy. It was now Timothy’s turn to **entrust** the gospel, and all other divinely revealed truths, to others.

In a state invitational track meet during my college years, I represented my team as the second man in the mile relay. The first man ran a fast first leg, and I did well on the second. But soon after I passed off the baton to the third man, one of our best runners, he stopped, walked onto the infield, and sat down. Our first horrified thought was that he had pulled a hamstring or twisted an ankle. I ran across the field and asked, “What happened?” “I don’t know,” he replied, “I just didn’t feel like running anymore.” Understandably, his teammates, the coach, and everyone else from our college were sickened and disgusted. “How could you do that?” we asked. “Don’t you know you’re not just representing yourself, but your team and your school? Have you forgotten all the time the coach has invested in you and that your teammates have invested to get where we are? How could you, in one brief, selfish second, destroy all of that?”

On an infinitely more important level, countless leaders in the church have simply dropped out of the Lord’s service, some with no better reason than the apathy of that collegiate runner.

Timothy had not reached that point of defection, but it is clear that Paul knew his young friend, his son in the faith, was being tempted in that direction. Before such a serious crisis occurred, therefore, he was saying in effect, “Don’t even consider dropping out or curtailing your work to suit your own desires. This isn’t your ministry but the Lord’s, and you have no right to quit or to slack until He ‘takes you out of the game,’ as it were, either by death or by rapture. I can’t let you become a broken link in God’s chain of faithful witnesses. You not only have to keep going yourself but you have to help others get going and keep going as well.”

The first stage in the spiritual “relay” was the truth being handed from Paul to Timothy, which the apostle describes here as Timothy’s careful receiving and studying **the things which** he had **heard from** Paul over the period of several years traveling with the apostle and of ministering with him in Ephesus.

In the presence of many witnesses carries the fuller idea of “supported by the confirming testimony of other teachers”—including the teaching of other apostles. In his second letter (Written about the same time as 2 Timothy), Peter attested that Paul authoritatively preached God’s Word (See 2 Peter 3:14–16). Those **witnesses** certainly would have included Paul’s fellow preachers and teachers, such as Barnabas and Silas (See Acts 14:1–3, 21–22; 15:35; 20:4). Other well-taught leaders in the church such as Luke, a companion of Paul on many of his trips, also would have been qualified to confirm to Timothy the divine authenticity of Paul’s teaching. From the time he first met and began accompanying Paul (Acts 16:1–3), Timothy was exposed to the public teaching and private counsel of **many** godly **witnesses** in addition to Paul.

Paratithēmi (**entrust**) is here an imperative and carries the idea of depositing something valuable for safekeeping. It is a verb form of the noun (*parathēkē*), used twice in the previous chapter, referring to the treasure Paul had entrusted to the Lord (1:12) and that Paul had entrusted to Timothy (v. 14)—namely, the treasure “of sound words which you have heard from me” (v. 13). Now it was time for the treasure with which Timothy had been entrusted to be entrusted by him to others.

Timothy’s assignment was to run the second lap, as it were, of this spiritual relay, in which he was to **entrust** the **things** he had been taught by Paul—that is, pass on the in depth teaching of God’s Word—to **faithful men** under his care. That which he was to carefully guard (1:14: cf. 1 Tim. 6:20) he also was to carefully teach.

The truth Paul is talking about here is beyond the basic gospel message of salvation, which is to be preached to all who will hear. He is rather talking about the careful, systematic training of church leaders who will teach and disciple other believers in the fullness of God’s Word. This particular ministry is to be selective. It is reserved for **faithful men, who will be able to teach others also**. He is directing Timothy to invest in the lives of spiritually devout men who are gifted to teach potential pastors and evangelists. Such men must already have proved their love for the Lord and their giftedness in His service. They must be prequalified by proven spiritual character and ability, as well as by fruitful labor.

Pistos (**faithful**) is used later in this chapter of the trustworthiness of God’s promise that “if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him” (v. 11), and a few verses later of Christ Himself, who, even “if we are faithless, . . . remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself” (v. 13). In other words, this special entrustment is reserved for **men** whose character reflects the faithfulness of God’s own Word and of God’s own Son. In this context, **faithful** not only refers to spiritual character but to spiritual giftedness. God does not call every believer to be a teacher and a teacher of teachers. Paul knew Timothy had such giftedness (See 1:6) and here instructs him to find others who were so gifted and to teach them.

Like Timothy, every preacher and teacher is to guard the purity and integrity of God's Word. Some of those also are called to accurately and fully teach other godly leaders in the church. As already mentioned, if the church is weak, it is because its leaders are weak. Conversely, if the church is to be strong, its leaders must be strong. And leaders can become strong only if they are carefully built up in the Word of God. We all received the truth from faithful men before us, and we are to preserve it so that it is passed on accurately and fully to the next generation (cf. 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 2:14).

It is for that primary purpose that Bible schools, Christian colleges, and seminaries are founded and that books and commentaries are written—to prepare dedicated Christian men and women for effective service to the church and in the world. And within that broader purpose is the narrower one of giving special attention to raising up new generations of mature spiritual leaders who are uniquely trained and assigned to carefully guard and faithfully articulate God's truth.

Both before and under the Old Covenant, God raised up many faithful men and women to be His witnesses. He also called Israel as a nation to “be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6). Not just the priests and prophets, but all the people, were “entrusted with the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2). They were to be a *nation* of God's intermediaries and witnesses to the pagan, Gentile world. Centuries before Christ gave the Great Commission to His disciples to “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (Matt. 28:19), God had given a similar commission to His chosen people Israel. Sadly, it was a commission they had failed to heed and fulfill, and, by the time of our Lord, the leadership of Israel was apostate and satanic (cf. John 8:44).

The third lap in the relay is for spiritually mature leaders, or **faithful men**, who themselves have been carefully trained, to teach others who show promise. This is just the start of a continuous process of spiritual reproduction, of being taught and of teaching, that is to continue until our Lord returns.

On a more general level, a similar process should involve all believers, whatever their particular spiritual gifts might be. This responsibility applies especially to elders “who work hard at preaching and teaching” (1 Tim. 5:17). But parents, Sunday school teachers, and youth leaders also are responsible, to the best of their ability, to pass on God's Word to those under their care. Every Christian has such a responsibility for any brother or sister in Christ whom he has opportunity to disciple, even briefly.

In a still wider sense, every believer has a responsibility to teach God's truth to any other believer, even one who is older and more mature in the faith. Pastors can learn from other church members, parents can learn from their children, teachers can learn from their students, wives can learn from their husbands, husbands can learn from their wives, and friends can learn from friends.

THE SOLDIER

Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. (2:3–4)

The second figure Paul uses to illustrate characteristics of a strong spiritual life is that of a soldier. In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul expands on this figure. After his counsel cited

above, to “be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might” (6:10), he says, “Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm” (vv. 11–13). **He admonished believers at Corinth about the offensive side of that battle,** saying, “Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses” (2 Cor. 10:3–4).

Paul not only calls on Timothy to serve the Lord as a soldier, **but as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.** A spiritual Christian does not simply do minimum duty for his Lord, **Christ Jesus,** but serves Him with everything he is and has.

The first mark of **a good soldier** that Paul mentions is the willingness to **suffer hardship.** By adding **with me,** he gives assurance that he would not ask anything of Timothy that he himself was not doing or willing to do. *Sunkakopatheō* (**suffer hardship with**) is a compound verb that means to suffer evil or pain along with someone else. One scholar translates the phrase, “take one’s share of rough treatment.” **With** does not represent a separate Greek preposition but is a part (*sun*) of the verb. **Me** is only implied in the Greek, the context indicating that Paul was speaking of himself.

It is difficult for Christians in most of the Western world to understand what serious spiritual warfare and suffering for Christ mean. The secular environment in our society is becoming more and more hostile to Christianity and to religion in general. But we are not faced with loss of job, imprisonment, and execution because of our faith. With few exceptions, being a Christian will not keep a student out of college or a worker from getting a good job. But the more faithful a Christian becomes and the more the Lord blesses his work, the more Satan will put roadblocks, hardships, and rejection in the way, the more evident the spiritual warfare will become, and the more frequent and obvious the **hardship** will become.

A **soldier in active service** does not have a 9 to 5 job, or even a long 60– or 70–hour work week. He is a **soldier** 24 hours a day, every day of the year. His body, his health, his skills, his time—all that he is—belong to the military in which he serves. Even when on leave, he is subject to recall at any time, without notice and for any reason. And whenever ordered into dangerous duty, he is expected to put his very life on the line without question or hesitation.

Consequently, he is separated from his normal environment, so that he will not **entangle himself in the affairs of everyday life.** **Entangle himself** translates a passive form of *emplekō*, which literally means to weave. Paul is not speaking about things that necessarily are wrong in themselves. It is not that a soldier should have no contact at all with his former friends and surroundings, but that he is not to become caught up and enmeshed in them. Those things are irrelevant to his soldiering and are always subject to being relinquished. In the same way, a good soldier of Christ Jesus refuses to allow earthly matters to interfere with the fulfillment of his duty to his Lord. Many Christians, pastors, special ministries, and doctrinally sound churches have been undermined by concerns and activities that are innocent in themselves but have been allowed to crowd out the primary purpose of serving Jesus Christ in the advancing of His kingdom against the forces of darkness.

Jesus recognized that such disconnection and call to duty required of His faithful disciple, a soldier in His active service, is not easy. As He and His disciples

were going along the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Permit me first to go and bury my father." But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God." And another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:57–62)

In the parable of the soils, Jesus identifies false believers whose nonsaving faith is short-lived with "the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful" (Matt. 13:22). Those are the kind of temporary professing Christians of whom Peter speaks: "If after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first" (2 Peter 2:20).

"The worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches" of which Jesus spoke are among **the affairs of everyday life** that can keep an unbeliever from receiving Christ and can keep believers from faithfully serving Him. Just as the dutiful soldier places his life willingly on the line in service of his country, so the faithful Christian will willingly "deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow [Christ]" (Matt. 16:24). He will say with Paul, "I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:24).

The third mark of a good soldier is a genuine desire to **please the one who enlisted him as a soldier**. In the same way, but of far greater importance, a Christian's deepest desire is to please the Lord Jesus Christ, his commander in chief, **the one who enlisted him**. It is impossible to serve two commanders in chief, just as it is impossible to serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). The faithful Christian's fondest hope is to be rewarded for loyal service and to hear his Master say, "Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master" (Matt. 25:21).

The strong desire to please other people is an integral characteristic of fallen man. And because of the continued influence of the old self (Eph. 4:22), even Christians are tempted to be men-pleasers. Many Christians succumb to that temptation and become more concerned about pleasing their fellow workers, their neighbors, and their friends than about pleasing the Lord. And for the same reason, many pastors fall into the trap of wanting to please their congregations or their communities more than to please the Lord. That desire inevitably leads to moral and spiritual decline, because pleasing the world, including worldly Christians, demands compromise of God's truth, God's standards, and personal holiness. It demands forsaking Christ as our first love. From the situation of the Ephesian church some years after Paul wrote this letter to Timothy (Who was pastoring in Ephesus), we know that forsaking Christ as our first love is possible even when our doctrine is sound and we toil and persevere for Him (See Rev. 2:2–4). When that happens, we must "remember therefore from where [we] have fallen, and repent" (v. 5). We must remind ourselves of Paul's sobering testimony: "If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10). When Christ is our first love, we will "have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him" (2 Cor. 5:9; 1 Thess. 2:4).

THE ATHLETE

And also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. (2:5)

The third figure Paul uses to illustrate characteristics of a strong spiritual life is that of **an athlete**, a metaphor he uses several times in his letters.

The phrase **competes as an athlete** translates the verb *athleō*, which means to contest, contend, wrestle, struggle. **The idea is that of a struggle that requires great determination to win. Athletes struggle, contend, compete, and strive to win.**

The difference between first and second places in an athletic event is not always a matter of talent. As in the fable of the tortoise and the hare, a less gifted athlete often surpasses another who is physically superior and more experienced, simply by having greater determination and persistence.

While watching a decathlon meet between the United States, Poland, and the U.S.S.R., I asked a friend, who was coaching the American team, to identify the best athlete among all those competitors. He pointed to a slender, lithe young man, and I asked, “Do you think he will win today?” Surprisingly, he answered, “No.” When I asked why, he pointed to another athlete and said, “He’s going to win, because he has the greatest determination, the strongest will to win. He is the most mentally tough competitor I have ever seen.” Sure enough, he did win that day. His name was Bruce Jenner, and two years later he won the Olympic gold medal in the decathlon, which ranked him as the greatest athlete in the world.

Our spiritual competition is not, of course, against other Christians. Trying to outperform another believer is far from spiritual. Rather, our competition is against our fleshly old self, against the world, and against Satan and those who serve him. And our goal is to “press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14).

Even the most gifted and determined **athlete**, bringing the most effort to the struggle, however, **does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules.**

In the Greek games, which continued for centuries under Roman rule and were still being held in Paul’s time, every participant had to meet three qualifications—of birth, of training, and of competition. First, he had to be a trueborn Greek. Second, he had to prepare at least ten months for the games and swear to that before a statue of Zeus. Third, he had to compete within the specific rules for a given event. To fail in any of those requirements meant automatic disqualification.

Comparable rules apply to spiritual Christians. We must be truly born again; we must be faithful in study and obedience of God’s Word, in self-denial, and in prayer; and we must live according to Christ’s divine standards of discipleship.

The very fact that we are Christians means we have met the qualification of being born again. But the other two requirements are far from automatic and involve constant dedication and constant effort. Together they constitute spiritual discipline, which comes from the same root as “disciple” and is the foundation of spiritual maturity. The disciplined disciple has control of his affections, his emotions, his priorities, and his objectives.

It goes without saying that all serious athletes must exert special effort not just during a game or a race but for many months, even years, beforehand. Writing to believers at Corinth, who were very familiar with the Isthmian games, which were played nearby, Paul asked rhetorically, “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all

things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:24–27). Paul’s victory in the realm of ministry was dependent on his body, with its lusts and impulses, not being in control of him, but rather he of it.

As Paul emphasizes in that passage, the wreath (*stephanos*) for which the Greek athletes competed was perishable, but the one for which the spiritual Christian competes is imperishable. It is “the crown [*stephanos*] of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8), “the unfading crown of glory” we will receive “when the Chief Shepherd appears” (1 Peter 5:4), “the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10). One day, like the twenty-four elders, we “will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast [our] crowns before the throne” (Rev. 4:10).

THE FARMER

The hardworking farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. (2:6)

The fourth and final familiar image Paul uses to illustrate characteristics of a strong spiritual life is that of a **farmer**. The farmer works to gain the crop for himself. That is how he makes his living. In New Testament times, farm laborers often were paid with a portion of the crops they helped to plant, cultivate, and harvest. The **hardworking farmer** received not only a greater share but also **the first... share of the crops**. The teacher has reward in knowing he has enriched the lives of his students, the soldier has the reward of pleasing his commander in chief, the athlete has the reward of a trophy, and the farmer has the reward of the first and best share of the crops.

Hardworking is a participle form of the verb *kopiaō*, which means to toil intensely, to sweat and strain to the point of exhaustion if necessary. The industrious farmer starts his hard and demanding work early and quits late. He endures the cold, the heat, the rain, and the drought. He plows the soil whether it is hard or loose. He does not wait for his own convenience, because the seasons do not wait for him. When the time comes to plant, he must plant; when weeds appear, he must remove them; and when the crop is mature, he must harvest it. What drives the man to such hard toil is the harvest.

The teacher often finds exhilaration in the aspiring minds of his students, the soldier often has the excitement of battle, and the athlete the thrill of competing. But most of a farmer’s working hours are tedious, humdrum, and unexciting. And, unlike the teacher, the soldier, and the athlete, a farmer often works alone. He has no students to stimulate him, no fellow soldiers to fight with him, no teammates or crowd to cheer him.

Many Christians’ lives are like the farmer’s. Although there may be occasional times of excitement and special satisfaction, the daily routine is often, in itself, unattractive and unrewarding. But whatever their day to day responsibilities may involve, all faithful believers are promised God’s blessing and reward. We may be underpaid, treated unfairly by our boss or fellow employees, and misunderstood or unappreciated by fellow Christians. But Christ’s reward to His faithful disciples is never deficient, never unfair, never late, and never omitted.

Our good works have nothing to do with keeping our salvation, no more than they had anything to do with our receiving salvation. But they have everything to do with working out our salvation (Phil. 2:12). Not only are “we... [God’s] workmanship,” Paul reminds us, but we are “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). When believers stand before the Lord’s judgment seat, His *bēma*, “each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward” (1 Cor. 3:13–14).

CONCLUSION

Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. (2:7)

There are certain things the spiritual Christian has to endure, such as suffering for the faith. There are certain things he has to avoid, such as becoming entangled with the affairs of the world. There are certain mandates he has to obey, namely, the commands of his Lord. There are certain things he has to do, including tasks that seem mundane and ordinary. And, just as surely, there are things he will be given to enjoy, the victory and the rewards of a dedicated, selfless, and disciplined life. Through His apostle, the Lord assures us: “Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).

Consider what I say, Paul continues. The verb *noeō* (**consider**) is used only here in the New Testament. It denotes perceiving clearly with the mind, of understanding fully, of considering carefully, of pondering and mulling over. The form here is an imperative, indicating that Paul was giving a strong admonition, not mere advice.

The apostle was saying to Timothy, and still says to believers today: “Under the Lord, think over and carefully ponder what I have been saying. Look at your own life and ask yourself if you are a strong Christian, a spiritual Christian, a mature Christian. Are you devoting yourself to guarding and teaching God’s Word? Do you deny yourself and count your life as nothing in order to faithfully serve the Lord? Do you keep a distance between yourself and the affairs of the world? Do you continually prepare yourself to serve your Master? Do you understand self-denial and self-sacrifice? Are you willing to pay the price that He demands?”

“If you can answer yes to those questions,” we are promised, **the Lord will give you understanding in everything**. You will be led with wisdom and insight through the challenges to victory.³

³ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1995). [2 Timothy](#) (pp. 36–47). Chicago: Moody Press.