



2 Timothy

RBS
2 Timothy 2:1-26

Lesson 2: The Lord's Servant

"And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness."
(2 Timothy 2:24-25a).

Doctrinal Focus: Gentleness distinguishes the life and ministry of the Lord's servant.

Read 2 Timothy 2:1-26.

Sustained suffering and hardship tempt even the strongest believer to sinful anger. Sadly, bitterness, severity, and harsh words come easily. Unchecked, they quickly compromise the integrity of pastoral ministry.

Therefore, Timothy must prize both tenacious devotion to gospel truth and gentleness towards all. These marks distinguish genuine gospel ministry. In his suffering, Timothy must learn to depend upon God's gift of the spirit of "power and love and self-control" (2 Timothy 1:7).

Timothy never lacked role models for ministry. He watched Paul serve God's church with "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:1, 2 Timothy 3:10). But more important than Paul's example was Christ's. "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ," Paul wrote the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:1). Christ himself serves as the ultimate model for all Christian ministers. Second Timothy 2:24 designates the pastor of God's church as "the Lord's servant." Readers will recall Isaiah's great "Servant of the Lord" and his four "Servant Songs" (Isaiah 42:1-9, 49:1-7, 50:4-11, and 52:13-53:12). These passages magnify the Servant's (Christ's) gentleness as he suffered for righteousness' sake and offered himself as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of his people. The Servant's care for his people establishes the standard for biblical ministry.

Verses 1-7

Verse 2 defines Timothy's pastoral mission: "what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." Timothy is to teach faithful men who in turn will teach other faithful men. Together they will instruct the church in Christian faith and practice.

What constitutes a faithful man is not a speculative question. First Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 list the qualifications for overseers (or elders)¹. This pattern of qualified men teaching other qualified men is the God-ordained method of preparing teachers who will hand down the great truths of the Christian gospel from generation to generation. That Paul taught the gospel in "the presence of many witnesses" (2 Timothy 2:1) means that the gospel is not an esoteric mystery known only by an elite few, but is a message that can be clearly and publically articulated in an accessible manner. It is through the proclamation of the gospel that God gathers, nourishes, and grows his church.

"Strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:1), Timothy is prepared for the mission. Paul exhorts him to pay attention to the virtues cultivated by those in three occupations: the soldier, athlete, and farmer (2 Timothy 2:3-6).

First, the soldier (2:3-4). Timothy must "share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." Disciplined and focused, the good soldier refuses

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to become entangled in civilian affairs that would distract him from his duties and displease his commander. The Lord's soldier never permits vocations or avocations or trivialities to turn him aside from his work. He aims to please the Lord.

Next, the athlete (2 Timothy 2:5). An athlete who fails to compete by the rules forfeits his victor's crown. The Lord's servant looks forward to "a crown of righteousness" that awaits those who have fought the fight of faith and finished the race (2 Timothy 4:7-8). But to obtain the crown he must conduct his life and ministry according to the rules God has established. In another letter Paul says:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

The Lord's servant pursues a holy life and a holy ministry. Without them there will be no victor's crown.

Timothy must take his cues from the soldier, athlete, and finally, the hardworking farmer (2 Timothy 2:6). He plants, tends his fields, and patiently waits. He will have the first share of the harvest. The Lord's servant patiently ministers the gospel knowing that God will bring forth a harvest of believers whose lives are adorned with holiness.

Good soldiers, athletes, and farmers take no shortcuts. Their fortitude, focus, and discipline never waver. As Timothy thinks deeply about the gospel and these examples, the Lord will grant him understanding in everything he needs to conduct a faithful pastoral ministry (2 Timothy 2:7).

Verses 8-13

Just as sustained suffering and hardship tempt the strongest believer to sinful anger, they also threaten the memory of the believer. Focusing on immediate personal pain, larger issues slip from memory. As Timothy contends for the gospel and suffers at the hands of his opponents, he must

"Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel" (2 Timothy 2:8). Jesus Christ, who was raised from the dead and who now reigns in heaven, is the offspring of King David and the Old Testament's promised Messiah. God kept his promise to David:

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. (2 Samuel 7:12-13; cf. Luke 1:32-33)

Jesus, the fulfillment of God's promise, is preached in the gospel (2 Timothy 2:10), and it is for Jesus that Paul suffers, unjustly shackled in chains, judged a criminal. Paul is bound, but God's word is not (2 Timothy 2:9)! Therefore, he is willing to "endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2:10). Careful attention should be paid to the relationship between the word of God and the salvation of God's elect people. From before the foundation of the world he chose an elect people for salvation (Ephesians 1:4), and ordained that they turn to Christ in faith and repentance through the proclamation of the gospel (Acts 13:48). For the elect's sake Paul willingly suffers as he proclaims the life-giving gospel.

Paul concludes this section with another trustworthy saying ("endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Timothy 2:11-13)², this one consisting of four succinct statements that underscore God's faithfulness. Together they offer both comfort and warning to the Lord's servant:

1. "If we have died with him, we will also live with him" (2 Timothy 2:11). The believer's suffering leads to his conformity to the image of the blessed Son of God who suffered, died, and was raised from the dead (Romans 8:28-29). The believer follows his Savior's pathway to glory.
2. "If we endure, we will also reign with him" (2 Timothy 2:12a) reinforces the Lord's own

teaching on the necessity of endurance (Mark 13:13, Revelation 2:10, 2:26).

3. "If we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Timothy 2:12b) echoes the Lord's severe warning: "whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:33).
4. "If we are faithless, he remains faithful" (2 Timothy 2:13a). However faithless men like Phygelus, Hermogenes, and Demas prove to be (2 Timothy 1:15, 4:10), God will remain faithful to his Word. God cannot do otherwise, for whether bringing salvation to the believer or judgment upon the faithless unbeliever, God is acting according to his holy character. "He cannot deny himself" (2 Timothy 2:13b).

Verses 14-26

These verses continue to unfold the character of God's minister.

If Timothy is to be a faithful pastor, he must strive to be a worker approved by God, one who handles with utmost care "the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15), the gospel. In verse 15, Paul emphasizes the Godward focus of ministry: "present yourself to God as one approved." Timothy may find himself shamed and scorned by unbelieving men, but what counts ultimately is God's approval of him as a "worker who has no need to be ashamed."

The church of Ephesus needed Timothy's faithful teaching. Ruinous quarrels and "irreverent babble" threatened the church (2 Timothy 2:14, 16-17a). Particularly dangerous was the teaching of Hymenaeus and Philetus, who deviated from gospel truth by asserting that the resurrection had already taken place (2 Timothy 2:17-18; cf. 1 Timothy 1:19-20). Although it is impossible to state precisely the details of their heresy, it is likely that they affirmed a past spiritual resurrection and denied a future bodily resurrection, a pernicious view that calls into question Christ's own resurrection and one that renders Christian faith vain (1 Corinthians 15:12-14). In this controversy Timothy need not despair. God is building his church, a house whose foundation is indestructible and bears the seal, "The Lord knows those who are his, and, Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity" (2 Timothy 2:19, cf. 1

Timothy 3:15). The Lord's servant draws comfort from the fact that he is known by the Lord, and steadfastly separates himself from evil.

Verses 20-22 press further the necessity of purity. In affluent homes, gold and silver plates and bowls were used for the "honorable" purpose of conveying the finest dishes to the banquet; wood and clay pots that carried the "dishonorable" waste products from the kitchen. The Lord's faithful servant must purify himself from all that is "dishonorable," those doctrines and behaviors that defile body and soul. Cleansed, he is "set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work."

Verses 22-26 define for Timothy the type of life lived by the servant who presents himself to God as one approved, cleansed, and set apart as holy. Negatively, he flees youthful passions, those behaviors and attitudes particularly associated with youth. Positively, he pursues four virtues: righteousness (biblical rectitude), faith (trust in God), love (for man), and peace (within the church). These virtues are pursued by the church together, by "those who call on the Lord from a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22).

Although the Lord's servant must guard the gospel (2 Timothy 1:12,14) and, for that reason, is not a stranger to controversy, he must forsake pointless controversies that lead to quarrels (2 Timothy 2:23). In fact, a quarrelsome spirit betrays the patient gentleness that distinguishes the Lord's servant (2 Timothy 2:24-25a). Instead of quarrelling, his kindness extends to all, especially to those who oppose him. For the sake of their salvation, he is willing to endure evil from their hands, correcting them with Christ-like gentleness. That the qualification "able to teach" appears in connection with dealing kindly and gently with opponents indicates that Paul means more than aptitude. The Lord's servant must have both the ability and moral authority to teach.

Verses 25-26 provide the proximate goal of the Lord's servant: the salvation of unbelievers. "God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 2:25). The Lord's servant presents the gospel but the outcome of his labors depends on the Lord. He must grant those hearers the gift of repentance. Like faith,

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repentance unto life is God's sovereign gift (Acts 11:18; cf. Ephesians 2:8, Philippians 1:29). Only the power of God can bring sinners to their senses and enable them to escape the devil's trap. Freed, they will no longer live to serve evil one.

If the proximate goal of the Lord's servant is the salvation of sinners, his ultimate goal is the glory of God. His entire life and ministry is diligently devoted to that end and demands the careful imitation of Christ, the great Servant of the Lord.

Notes

1. Elder and overseer are terms that refer to the same church office. Observe how Paul uses the terms interchangeably in Titus 1:5-7.
2. Cf. 1 Timothy 1:15, 3:1, 4:9, and Titus 3:8.

Suggested Commentary

The Message of 2 Timothy by John Stott (The Bible Speaks Today Series)



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Questions for Discussion

Read 2 Timothy 2:1-26.

1. Read the "Servant Songs" of Isaiah: Isaiah 42:1-9, 49:1-7, 50:4-11, and 52:13-53:12. List the characteristics of the Servant. What qualities of the Servant appear in 2 Timothy 2, ones that Christian servants must imitate?
2. Paul identifies Timothy's mission in 2 Timothy 2. What is it? How is that pattern of ministry implemented in your church?
3. What lessons from ministry should we draw from the good soldier, athlete, and hard-working farmer (2 Timothy 2:3-6)?
4. Read verse 8. Why must Timothy "*remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead?*" Why is it important that Jesus is identified as "the offspring of David?"
5. In verses 8-9, how does Paul's doctrine of election and preaching affect his willingness to suffer hardship? What hardships does your church face as it proclaims the gospel?
6. What do we learn about God's character in verses 11-13? How does your knowledge of these truths about God's character affect your lifestyle and ministry choices?
7. Read verses 14-19. What was the false teaching of Hymenaeus and Philetus? What does Paul identify as the malign effects upon the church of false teaching and foolish quarreling?

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8. Read verse 15. What does it mean to be a worker approved by God? What is required for someone to rightly handle the truth? In your church, what safeguards are in place to ensure that the word of God is handled properly?

 9. What comfort and encouragement does verse 19 provide God's servant? Verse 19 speaks of the seal that marks God's foundation. How do these two truths comfort and encourage you?

 10. Read verses 20-22. Paul uses the metaphor of a house. What is his purpose in distinguishing between dishonorable and honorable vessels?

 11. Can Christian work and service be performed without moral purity? According to verse 21, what is the outcome of the servant who "cleanses himself from what is dishonorable"?

 12. In verse 22, Paul commands Timothy "to flee youthful passions." What are sins that provide particular temptations to younger servants of the Lord? In the second half of this verse, Paul identifies four virtues. How should you pursue these virtues so they may benefit your congregation? How do you pursue virtue in a real way—as opposed to the appearance of virtue? How does the pursuit of virtue shape your Christian character?

 13. Read verses 24-26. Identify the elements of the godly servant lifestyle and ministry. What are the goals of the Lord's servant? When is it most difficult for you to resist quarreling and to deal gently with Christianity's opponents?

 14. What is repentance? What is the relationship between God's sovereignty and repentance? How can the truth that repentance is God's gift encourage you as you present the gospel?