

2 Timothy 2:1-7

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Paul pushes Timothy to be strong, because Christ gives him favor and has a purpose for his teaching. Timothy is exhorted to pass on Paul's teaching to faithful men, to suffer like Paul has as a good soldier, a competitive athlete, and a hard-working farmer.

In chapter 2, Paul begins with *You therefore, my son*. The *therefore* refers back to what Paul has stated in Chapter 1. In Chapter 1 Paul reminded his disciple and successor to his ministry in the gospel of his spiritual heritage, both from his grandmother and mother as well as from Paul, his spiritual father. He exhorted Timothy to continue that heritage, and “kindle afresh” his spiritual gifting with courage and boldness, consistent with the spirit that God had granted him, a spirit of power, love, and discipline. He reminded Timothy of Paul’s commitment to give his life for the gospel, because of the surpassing benefit of laying up treasures in heaven, rather than gaining the comforts of earth.

To live consistent with these things, Paul exhorted Timothy to fearlessly continue to preach the truth which he heard from Paul, and not be ashamed of Paul’s chains in the gospel.

Paul gave Timothy an example of what not to do, by telling him of those who had been unfaithful. He also provided a good example to follow, of one who had been faithful. This clearly indicates that even someone as advanced in his faith as Timothy has a daily choice whether to see life as it is, and sacrifice all for the gospel, or believe the deceptions and false promises of the world. In light of these things, Paul now admonishes Timothy, saying, *You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus*.

The word translated *grace* in Paul’s admonition for Timothy to *be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus*, is “charis” and means “favor.” The context determines who is granting favor, and for what reason. This can be seen in Luke, which says:

“And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”
(Luke 2:52)

The word translated “favor” in this verse from Luke is also “charis” so it could be translated “grace.” In this case, humans in Jesus’ community were attributing favor to Jesus as a boy because he was growing in stature and wisdom; the “grace” or “favor” was being attributed due to a value judgement of Jesus’ life and character.

In the case of Paul’s letter to Timothy, Paul asks Timothy to *be strong in the grace*, or favor, *that is in Christ Jesus*. In chapter 1, Paul noted in verse 9 that Jesus “saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace (‘charis’)” (2 Timothy 1:9). The *grace*, or favor of Jesus gave was to save Timothy by grace, then give him a holy calling by grace. Timothy’s salvation was “not according to our works,” but rather was a gift of Jesus.

But it was up to Timothy to decide whether to walk in the holy calling. As Paul says to the Ephesians, we are His workmanship, created for good works which He prepared beforehand (Ephesians 2:10). It is our choice whether to walk in those works. To *be strong in the grace/favor* of the Lord requires exercising the “discipline” to exert the “power” that is the spirit God grants us, as Paul described in 1:7. The point of this entire letter is to exhort Timothy to make good choices. To trust God. To adopt a perspective that is true, rather than untrue. And to take actions based on what is true, which will lead to Timothy’s true self-interest.

In Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul makes clear that being saved from eternal separation from God is a matter of the work of Jesus, and is a gift, freely given apart from our works. Paul is not questioning whether Timothy is born again. He is questioning what Timothy will decide to do with his life. Whether he will choose to walk in the good works which Christ prepared beforehand (Ephesians 2:10). Timothy has been given the favor (“charis”/grace) of a holy calling; will he fulfill it? According to Paul’s teaching, every believer is given a holy calling, and has this same basic choice, although each person’s calling and opportunity differs (Ephesians 2:10; Romans 12:1-8; 1 Corinthians 12).

Accordingly, Paul admonishes Timothy to discharge the ministry he was given, by the laying on of hands, and tells Timothy, *The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also*. In order to properly exercise his holy calling, and kindle afresh his gift, consistent with his spiritual heritage, Paul urges Timothy to do two fundamental things:

1. Discern who are *faithful men*, who are willing to learn, then *teach others also*.
2. *Entrust* to these “faithful men” *the things which* Timothy learned from Paul. Help them understand it thoroughly enough that they will be able to teach it.

Paul admonishes Timothy to conduct a ministry of multiplication. It is inferred that Timothy should not get distracted by “squeaky wheels.” He should not invest his time in those who are needy, but unwilling to listen and change; those unwilling to be taught and grow. He should find people eager to learn and apply the lessons of the gospel and invest his time and energy with those. Then he should do what he can to help these people teach others, who will in turn teach others. This multiplication strategy is the way Christianity went from a tiny group to half of the Roman world in just 300 years.

In exercising this mission of effective, high-multiplication teaching and mentoring, Paul asks Timothy to *Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus*. Paul asks Timothy to consider that he is on a mission that is akin to a military mission. In a military mission, *hardship* is expected. The Roman army was famous for being able to march all night and still be ready for battle the next day. Their ability to suffer hardship was at the very core of their effectiveness. Paul asks Timothy to have the same mettle. To choose the same mindset that a Roman soldier chooses.

Now Paul expands on the military example. He says *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*. Timothy is in *active service* for the Lord. *The one who enlisted* Timothy is Jesus Christ.

In order to *please the one who enlisted* him, Timothy must rise above the ordinary cares of life that would bother an average person. This is because *no soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life*. The soldier on the battlefield is not worrying about buying houses, paying mortgages, keeping friends happy, managing an image, etc. The soldier on the battlefield concerns himself with executing the mission given by his general, so that his company can succeed.

Is this really life and death, as with a soldier? It certainly is for Paul. Paul is in a Roman prison awaiting execution. He knew that was a risk, and embraces it boldly. He considers it a privilege to die for the cause of Christ, his general. He urges Timothy to follow in his footsteps. If Timothy also ended up in prison, it would make Paul proud. Why? Because Paul has in mind the very best interest of his “beloved son” in the faith. Paul understands that the best way to gain the maximum benefit from this life, is to lay down your life for the cause of Christ (Matthew 10:39).

Paul wants Timothy to be successful, like a great soldier. Paul had significant contact with the Roman military, and likely knew a substantial amount about the culture and approach of the Roman army (Philippians 1:12-13). The question for each of us is whether we will make our once-in-an-existence opportunity to live by faith count during our lives on this earth.

Paul now moves from a military example to an athletic example. He states that *Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules*.

Paul and Timothy had both visited Corinth, home of the Isthmian games, which were conducted on off years from the Olympic Games. Timothy would have fully understood the image being offered by Paul. In order to participate in the Isthmian Games, each athlete had to meet the following requirements to follow certain *rules*. Failure to meet certain requirements/*rules* would result in being disqualified. Some of these were:

- Each contestant had to be a natural-born Greek
 - The gospel of Christ corollary was that to win the prize of life requires being born again into the family of Christ (John 3:14-16). Paul made clear that Jesus “has saved us,” referring to both himself and Timothy (2 Timothy 1:9). So this requirement is met for any believer in Christ.
- Each contestant had to follow strict training rules, including a rigid diet
 - The corollary of the gospel of Christ is that to win the prize of life requires suffering as Jesus suffered, and doing whatever we do as unto the Lord (Romans 8:17b, Colossians 3:23-24; 2 Timothy 2:5). Not all born as Greeks won this great prize, only those who were faithful. The same is true with believers in Christ.
- Each contestant had to trying their hardest in all training exercises.
 - The corollary of the gospel of Christ is that to win the prize of life requires being a good steward of our own gifts, calling, and opportunity, as Paul will expound on further, in verses 11-13.

Failure to follow the diet or train with full earnestness would result in being disqualified. So, in order to compete and win, no contestant could *win the prize unless he competes according to the rules*. This included strict training and discipline. This connects with the spirit Paul said God has

granted us in Christ, a spirit of “power, and love, and discipline.” (2 Timothy 1:7). Part of following *the rules* was to have the discipline to remain focused, undistracted, and give full effort. The goal, of course, is to *win the prize*. The *prize* of Jesus is eternal, and never fades. Unlike the wreath (crown) received by the athletic victors, the crowns of Jesus last forever.

Paul used this same example of the Isthmian games in 1 Corinthians 9. Timothy was sent to minister to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 4:17). He was also a co-author with Paul of 2 Corinthians. So it is hard to imagine that he did not know this passage from 1 Corinthians 9 well. In that passage Paul spoke of foot races and boxing.

Paul (and likely Timothy) admonished the Corinthians to “Run in such a way that you may win” (1 Corinthians 9:24). If the Greek athletes can exercise “self-control” (1 Corinthians 9:25) or “discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7) to win a temporal reward, how much more should believers exercise self-control/discipline to win an eternal reward? Paul here seems to be reminding Timothy to apply something he has taught many times. We know it was well-received by Timothy because this letter is included in the New Testament. This tells us Timothy both embraced as well as taught what he received. In doing so he was exercising the spirit of humility that he was admonished to live by in this letter.

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul made a contrast, noting that “they (the athletes) do it to receive a perishable wreath.” The winners of the Isthmian Games would be called up to the “Bema Seat” to receive a garland made of vegetation. This would give them great honor, one of the greatest honors available in Greek society. But the honor was, by its nature “perishable.” The trophy would decay. The fame will be lost. All they won would pass away.

On the other hand, believers in Christ can win their race and be called up to the “Bema Seat” (judgement seat) to receive an eternal reward that will never fade away. Paul said “I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27). So Paul applied the same standard to himself that he is admonishing Timothy to adopt: “compete by the rules of the contest.”

Paul will tell us in 4:8 that there is a “crown of righteousness” laid up for him, because he has remained faithful unto death (which for him is imminent). The word translated “crown” in 4:8 is the same word translated “wreath” in 1 Corinthians 9, describing the prize of the Greek athletes. The “wreath” from Jesus that will be “imperishable” in 1 Corinthians 9 is the same as the “crown” Paul anticipates he will receive in heaven in 2 Timothy 4. Paul urges Timothy to adopt the mentality of a dedicated soldier, completing the mission to please his general, along with the discipline of an elite athlete, competing according to the rules and winning the race. Each is an admonition for Timothy to make his life count, to win the maximum eternal rewards of life.

After comparing the believer’s calling to a soldier and an elite athlete, Paul gives the analogy of a *farmer*. And not just any *farmer*, but a *hard-working farmer*. Paul states that *The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops*. The *hard-working farmer* clearly continued farming all the way until the harvest. He did not plant then quit. If he did, he should get a small share of the harvest, or perhaps none. If he failed to weed and prune after planting, he would not deserve a first share of the harvest.

Rather, the *hard-working farmer* worked diligently all the way through to the end of the harvest. As a result, he ought to get the major portion, to *be the first to receive his share of the crops*, which is the reward of the harvest. Paul likely avoids the word “deserves” because in the economy of God, no one can ever obligate God. All rewards of God are a matter of mercy, of favor (“charis”) that God gives for His own reasons. There are no external standards by which anyone can ever demand anything of God. But we can trust what God says of Himself, that He is merciful. He wants us to succeed, like a human parent is proud to see their children succeed (Matthew 7:11).

Paul says for Timothy to *Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything*. It is likely Timothy has heard this many times before, but now Paul is asking Timothy to *consider* or ponder how to apply these things to his current situation. Life continues, and we are constantly challenged to apply what we have learned to different situations. But Paul is confident that if Timothy will deliberate on what Paul has said, that *the Lord will give Timothy understanding in everything*.

Biblical Text

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.² The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.³ Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.⁴ 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.⁵ Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules.⁶ The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops.⁷ Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.