



Faithfulness in the Midst of Apostasy

Series: 2 Timothy: The Final Charge From a Faithful Apostle

2 Timothy 1:15-2:13

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Last week we looked at the beginning of Paul's last will and testament, this intensely personal yet universally applicable letter written "not merely in ink but in Paul's life blood." And what we saw in the first few verses really sets the tone for the rest of the letter. Paul's chief concerns were for the preservation and proclamation of the gospel, for Timothy to remain strong in the Lord and faithful to Christ after Paul is gone, and for the spread of the gospel to continue throughout the world and the ages – pure, uncontaminated, and uncorrupted. In this very personal letter to Timothy, but also one that was meant to be for all of the church as well, Paul gave to Timothy a solemn charge – to be unashamed, to guard the gospel, to preach it faithfully, to suffer for it even unto death, if necessary. Paul was going to die, but the gospel must live on! And in these first 14 verses, Paul expressed his confidence in Timothy's faith and in Jesus Christ to preserve and proclaim the gospel through him. Really, the first 14 verses amounted to a "pep talk" of sorts that Paul gave to Timothy.

But after this "pep talk," however, he continues to drive home the vital importance that he remain faithful, that he stand fast in the Lord, that he not lose his grip on the gospel, but that he guard the good gospel deposit that has been entrusted to him. And it is crucial that Paul do so. And here's why – the state of the professing church in Asia. And so...

Before he gets into specific exhortations and commands, Paul reminds Timothy of what he already knows about the state of the professing church, of the situation in Asia, where Paul had spent so much time preaching and teaching the gospel. It is not a good one at all. He writes: "You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes." (2 Timothy 1:15, ESV)

There is a creeping apostasy, a falling away from Christ, which is occurring in the churches in Asia. Paul says that everyone in Asia had turned away from him. Now certainly that is an exaggeration – not everyone was falling away from Paul – Timothy and Onesiphorus did not. Luke was still faithful and there were still faithful brothers and sisters to be found there. But the point Paul is making is that there was very real opposition to his teaching, leaders and churches distancing themselves from Paul’s doctrine, from the truth of God which had been entrusted to him and which he faithfully preached. This was not news to Timothy – he was well aware of this creeping declension, this sliding away from the truth and it was serious.

Now, we do not know who Phygelus and Hermogenes are. There is nothing more said about them anywhere in Scripture but they were clearly men who were known to both Paul and Timothy and Paul mentions them to underscore the severity of the situation. Most likely they would have been men who were prominent leaders in the church, men whom Paul had poured into, men who people would have expected to stand firm with Paul in the faith and to support and defend the apostolic truth and the apostle himself. They were most likely widely identified as friends and partners in the gospel with Paul, expected to be loyal, but they had proven to be unfaithful. They went from being Paul’s advocates to his adversaries.

This turning away from Paul, this shrinking from the truth that Paul preached, this refusal to be identified with Paul, this rejection of his teaching and rejection of Paul’s authority as a servant of Christ was a very serious thing. This is how full blown apostasy happens. The progress of apostasy, of ultimately falling away from Christ, takes a very specific route. You see it in Biblical history and you see it in the history of the church. It begins with abandoning the faithful preacher of the gospel, with rejecting his ministry. Then it progresses to a rejection of clear biblical truth – of the apostles’ doctrine. Then it ends with a full-blown denial of Christ and that was the path that some of the churches in Asia were on.

Timothy’s age is not so different from our own – in fact, it is no different at all. It is no great surprise to see the distorted values, the plummeting morality, the confused thinking, and the rampant wickedness of our culture. We shouldn’t be shocked at the decay of a godless society. That is to be expected. It is the state of the professing church that is most shocking. The modern church today is in much the same state as the church in Paul and Timothy’s day. Christian standards, morals and ethics are disappearing in the church. Immorality is rife in the church; worldliness is rampant. Churches are forsaking clear biblical truth and replacing it with human wisdom, abandoning holiness unto the Lord and embracing perversity, relinquishing

their hold on the biblical Jesus and replacing Him with a distorted and demonically inspired fraud. Increasingly, faithful preachers of the gospel are being marginalized and demonized, labeled as extreme and mean-spirited, unbending, unpastoral and unchristian if they remain loyal to Christ and to his gospel in the face of mounting pressure to abandon a firm stand in the truth. It is the same sort of thing that Paul and Timothy were facing in Asia. Later in this very letter, Paul would describe the declining state of so many of the churches in Asia, saying: “For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.” (2 Timothy 3:2–5, ESV)

In contrast to Phygelus and Hermogenes, however, Paul offers the example of Onesiphorus – a faithful brother in the midst of faithlessness. He says of him: “May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me— may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.” (2 Timothy 1:16–18, ESV) In contrast to the treachery of Phygelus and Hermogenes, Paul rejoices in the faithfulness of Onesiphorus who proved to be a true brother in the midst of adversity. His heart swells with gratitude and with prayer for the blessing of both his house and of Onesiphorus himself, and especially on the Day when Christ returns to judge the living and the dead.

And Paul underscores Onesiphorus’ faithfulness in two ways. First he mentions the way that he earnestly and persistently searched for Paul in Rome. That would neither have been safe nor easy to do. The Romans were not announcing Paul’s whereabouts and to inquire about him would have put a target squarely on Onesiphorus’ back. It took real courage to search for Paul in this situation. Secondly, Paul mentions how Onesiphorus was not “ashamed of his chains,” that is, not ashamed of Paul’s imprisonment and the reason that he was in prison – namely the gospel. Instead, Onesiphorus took it upon himself to refresh Paul – literally to “cheer and encourage Paul’s soul.” Though no doubt he provided for some of Paul’s physical needs, just his faithful friendship to Paul in the midst of his gospel sufferings cannot be overestimated. In fact, Onesiphorus name actually means “bringer of help.” But not only was he a blessing to Paul, he was a blessing to the church in Ephesus as Timothy well knew. So Paul transitions to the exhortation that Timothy needs to hear from him by highlighting both the falling away that was taking place in the church in Asia as represented by Phygelus and Hermogenes, but also

those who were remaining faithful to the truth, standing unashamed with Paul for Christ as represented by Onesiphorus.

We see, then, the great challenge that was facing Timothy and that faces us. In this age of widespread declension from the truth, of lukewarmness that plagues the visible church, of outright apostasy, of turning away from faithfulness to Christ, of shame regarding the gospel – how do you remain faithful? How do you guard the gospel and stand firm for Christ. Paul gives us four things to think about in the first 13 verses of chapter 2. They are great instructions for Timothy as a young pastor, to all pastors in fact, but they are equally applicable to all believers. Follow with me Paul’s train of thought as he encourages Timothy. How do you remain faithful?

First, you yourself must be strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ. Look at verse 1: “You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus,” (2 Timothy 2:1, ESV) It is not immediately obvious in the English, but the “you” in this verse is emphatic. In contrast to the great number in the church of Asia that are turning away from Paul and the alarming decline that is taking place, if Timothy wants to endure, he, himself, must be strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ. What does that mean? These are more than just philosophical religious words; they are words of great practical value. The only way that any of us can stand in this present, evil age is by being strengthened in the grace that is in Christ.

Here is what Paul is getting at. In order for Timothy to stand fast in the midst of the shifting sands around him, he must first have his confidence firmly resting on the gospel of grace, the salvation given to him through faith in Jesus Christ. That must be the ground of his life. Timothy needed to have a firm grip on His Savior, on what Christ had done to redeem him from his sins. He needed to remember that his standing with Christ was not based upon himself or upon the good works that he had done in Christ’s name but upon Jesus. His entire identity was rooted in who he was in Christ. Paul wrote in Romans 5:6-11: “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” (Romans 5:6–11, ESV) This grace and Timothy needed to be continually mindful and strengthened in its truth.

I was talking to Sam this week and he told me about going to a meeting of the Navigators at Col. Timmons' house. The whole focus of the night was remembering who Jesus is. He said to me, "I enjoyed every second of it. It really puts everything in perspective. VMI isn't the end all and my rank and class doesn't define who I am. Christ does. It's easy to become wrapped up and enveloped by the VMI system and not see clearly what is truly valuable." And then speaking of the other members of the Corps that he saw there, he said, "There's a commonality. It's deeper than being brothers in arms. It's Jesus. Being a saved sinner. That's what the source of true friendship and brotherhood is." He's right. He's learning what it means to be strengthened in the grace that is in Jesus Christ, finding your standing in the grace of Christ alone, and it's what Paul was exhorting Timothy to.

To stand fast, Timothy needed to be convinced and certain about where he stood with Christ. He needed to be reminded of the grace of Christ continually because he would face great pressures and he would sometimes fail and it was then that he needed to be reminded of Christ's grace freely given, to go to His Word and by faith lay hold of the promises of God that are ours in Christ – to never leave nor forsake us, to lead us in the paths of righteousness, to give strength to our inner man, to renew our minds, to give us strength to stand in temptation, to kill sin in us, that we have been raised to the newness of life, that everything that we need for godliness is found in Him and those who trust in Christ will never be put to shame. All of our life is one of dependent strength in Christ, through the grace given to us in Him.

Timothy knew this, but he needed to be reminded. Being strengthened in the grace that is in Jesus Christ calls for a daily reliance upon Him, a daily communion with Him in His word and prayer, a conscious trusting in Him, and relying on the resources of His life in us, nurturing our spiritual growth in Him, and longing for Him to live His life through us. Paul said: "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20, ESV) It is His love in you loving, His joy in you rejoicing, His power in you enabling you to remain faithful, His compassion in you moving you to mercy, His boldness in you proclaiming his truth and standing on His word, His mind in you giving to you understanding, His faithfulness in you persevering. It is all Him. All His grace. Make your life in Him.

How do we remain faithful? What Paul said to Timothy is true for all of us. We must be strong in the grace of Jesus Christ. Then,

Second, you pass the faith onto others who will themselves pass it on. Paul says: “and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Timothy 2:2, ESV) The way that you stand strong and remain faithful is by passing on the truth that you have received from me to others. You can understand the progression, can’t you? You must make yourself strong in the grace that is in Christ through the gospel daily and then pass the life-giving truth unto others. You cannot give to others what you yourself do not possess.

Paul says in effect, “Timothy, along with so many others, you have heard the truth about Christ from my own lips. You have heard the glorious gospel; you have come to know what it means to follow Christ personally, to know His saving grace, to know His sustaining grace, to know His life-transforming grace. Now be faithful to pass it on to faithful men.”

In other words, pass the truth on to people who want to hear it, who desire to know the truth, who want to know Christ. Find the ones who gladly hear what you are preaching, who are tired of the mind-numbing and soul-destroying hum of the age, and teach them, pour your life into them for the good of their souls so that the gospel truth will not die out but will be passed from faithful man or woman to faithful man or woman. Look for the ones with the searching minds, for the humble hearts, for the broken souls who delight in the forgiveness and life that Christ gives and invest in them, the ones who are willing to receive the truth of God, who are willing to submit themselves – mind and body to the holy truth of God.

Now that presupposes a few things. First, despite the claims of our culture to the contrary, there is actually a body of spiritual truth, of reality defining truth that can be known and passed on to others. Truth is not a matter of personal preference; it is a matter of reality and revelation from God. That is why the apostles so doggedly held to the Christian faith and presented it in doctrinal form. There is no Christian faith in the absence of sound doctrine. “If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing...,” (1 Timothy 6:3–4a, ESV) It is this message that is our only hope. “And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,” (Colossians 1:21–22, ESV)

Second, it presupposes that you know the truth and that requires a lifetime of study and growth. Later Paul writes in this letter to Timothy: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15, ESV) This is a lifelong labor.

And then third, it requires that we actually invest in the lives around us. Christian husbands must share the truth that God teaches them to their wives and vice versa. Parents must entrust the truth to their children. Brothers with brothers, sisters with sisters. More mature believers must see their responsibility to impart biblical truth to younger believers in the flock. All of us who know Christ are responsible to share the gospel with those who are lost, so that they may be saved. God does not give us the truth to hoard or to set on shelf and polish. He gives it to you so that you will pass it on to others. If you want to be found faithful, pass on the truth to others. Then Paul says:

Third, commit yourself unreservedly to Jesus Christ. Paul uses three great illustrations here to describe the kind of commitment to Christ that faithfulness requires. And here’s the truth. Embracing hardship and unreserved commitment to Christ are not very appealing to an age that thrives on and prizes ease, relaxation, and independence. One thing, though, is certain in these illustrations that Paul chooses -- Christianity was never intended to be a comfortable, easy, or relaxed religion. Yes, there are times for quiet contemplation, but the faith the way that Paul envisions it is full of energy and vigor. He tells Timothy and us that remaining faithful is going to require the

Dedication of a Soldier Paul writes: “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.” (2 Timothy 2:3–4, ESV) This analogy of soldiering for Christ is one of Paul’s favorites. He speaks of Archippus and Epaphroditus as his fellow soldiers. He speaks of the vital need in Ephesians 6 to put on the whole armor of God and in Romans 13, the armor of light. The reason is clear. It is because being a Christian in a world of unbelief is a war, a battle, and a fight. Paul is not one for making compromises and truces with the world, with sin or with falsehood. He has the right view of things and he calls Timothy and each of us to be willing to endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ.

Now when he uses this illustration, of course, he has in mind the greatest soldiers in the world of his time – the Roman soldier -- and thinking about a Roman soldier gives us a real clue as to what Paul has in mind. Josephus give this description of a good Roman soldier saying: The soldier who was always ready to faithfully obey his commander without grumbling and complaining; to be constantly in training whatever hardships must be endured; to fight bravely, never leaving his post even if it meant death; to work with his company as a unit, carrying out his specific task, was the one who received the praise from his commander and was rewarded for his service. He was a good soldier [The Topical Josephus, 114].

This is what Paul was calling Timothy to as a soldier of Christ. When he says: No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him – Paul is calling for a single-mindedness, a desire and focus as a soldier to please the one who had enlisted him. For the Roman, that would be the general who had called up the army of which he was a part. For the Christian, obviously, it is Christ who saved us and called us with a holy calling. The key here is understanding the word “entangled.” There are legitimate civilian pursuits –providing for our families, holding down a job, social responsibilities. But the point that Paul is making is this. Though there is nothing wrong with the right use of recreation, or hobbies, or sports, or a vacation -- if we use them to refresh us for the battle -- we are not to become encumbered with them and allow them to take our focus off of a single minded devotion to Christ. We cannot allow anything of a temporal nature to take on a greater importance than our identity in Christ or to preclude our unhindered faithfulness to Jesus and in some way obscure or weaken our devotion to Christ expressed in practical ways. Thomas Lea says it well. He said: “Servants of Christ are not merely to be well-rounded dabblers in all types of trivial pursuits. They are tough-minded devotees of Christ who constantly choose the right priorities from a list of potential selections.”

One last thing about Roman soldiers was this: Roman put soldiers into a cohort with whom they stayed for the rest of their military career. They endured hardship together, worked together, lived life together. This inseparable bond became the advantage of the Roman army against their foes. It is to be the same with us, all of us striving together with a single-minded dedication to Christ. No going AWOL. Here’s the thing. We are not called as Christians to enjoy an easy life, to make everything around us as comfortable and manageable as possible. That has been an affliction of the modern evangelical church for too long. We are to endure hardness that comes with gospel faithfulness and live with a single-minded devotion to Christ

no matter the cost. We are called to serve Christ, who is the Warrior of our salvation and our great Captain in the spiritual fight. Then Paul says Timothy and we are to have the

Discipline of an Athlete He writes: “An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.” (2 Timothy 2:5, ESV) He has in mind here an Olympic athlete. Athletes who competed in the ancient Olympics were required to swear before Zeus that they would spend ten months in highly disciplined training for the games or they would be disqualified. You couldn’t just roll off your couch and compete. There were no short cuts to competing, no steroids or performance enhancing drugs. You had to work hard in order to compete and win the crown.

What Paul was teaching Timothy and us is that remaining faithful in this world is going to require rigorous discipline for the sake of godliness. “Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.” (1 Timothy 4:7–8, ESV) We are all attracted, for instance, by promises to get rich quick or lose weight fast. But there is no magic shortcut to godliness apart from but the daily discipline of spending time with the Lord in His word and prayer, choosing the hard right over the easy wrong, choosing righteousness over sin, putting to death besetting sins and taking seriously the commands of Christ.

There are temptations on every side to give in, to indulge our flesh, to things that lead to distraction, to disruption and to a lessening of spiritual intensity in our lives. Our determination must be to strive against those things and to discipline ourselves for godliness, running “the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.” (Hebrews 12:2–3, ESV) None of us just falls into faithfulness and godliness. We must pursue it and discipline ourselves to attain it. It is part of being unreservedly committed to Christ. Then Paul says that we must have the

Diligence of a Farmer He writes: “It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.” (2 Timothy 2:6, ESV) Farming is hard work. It requires preparing the ground,

sowing the seed, pulling weeds, guarding against pests, and bringing in the harvest before it spoils. Farming is not flashy, not exciting, not showy or cool. It's hard work and it requires real diligence and patience. It requires long-term faithfulness in one direction. But that diligence ensures a future harvest. Months of labor are required and you don't see discernable results right away.

That's true of faithfulness to Christ. Timothy had no way of knowing what God might accomplish through his faithfulness. The results may not be immediately obvious. It true for us as well. But the point that Paul is making is this: the harvest to which we are looking with expectancy will come in the day when we see Jesus face-to face and it will be impossible to measure until that day. "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up." (Galatians 6:7–9, ESV) Have the diligence of a farmer and keep sowing faithfully to the Spirit.

JC Ryle says: I will never shrink from 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 to expect a believer to attain much holiness who was not diligent about his bible reading, prayers, and the use of 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.

To all of these things Paul says: "Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything." (2 Timothy 2:7, ESV) Think about these things. Evaluate your life in light of them. Examine yourself. We do not live in a time that is given much to thinking and really mediating on anything for very long anymore. We function in sound bites and thirty-second commercials, but faithfulness to Christ requires more. Really think about these things and Christ will give you the right perspective.

If we are going to be proven faithful in a world of unfaithfulness, in the midst of lukewarmness and outright apostasy, we must be strengthened in the grace that is in Jesus Christ; we must

pass on the faith to others that will pass it on as well; and we must be unreservedly committed to Christ and then Paul says:

Fourth, you must remember who is your King and forget not His benefits. He writes: "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!" (2 Timothy 2:8–9, ESV) He doesn't say "Remember your theology," or "remember your religion." He says, "Remember Jesus Christ." Remember the hero of salvation. To do all that Paul was commanding seems impossible and it is in human strength and that's why Paul says, "Remember the One who is for you. The One who rose from the dead to prove His divinity and to prove that your salvation is full and assured and that His gospel is true." Through His death and resurrection, Christ broke the shackles of sin and of its wages, death, which is the greatest weapon of Satan. When we trusted in Him, He became our Savior and our Lord, breaking the power of sin and Satan and death in our own lives. Remember the One who lives in you by His Spirit and has given to you the newness of life. Remember Jesus, who was a real man, offspring of David and Son of God who is the King, not only of Israel, but of the Universe. Remember the One of whom I preach in my gospel, Son of God and Savior, Lord and King, Risen and soon returning Lord who will judge the living and the dead. He is the victor. He is all-powerful. It was this that Paul clung to as his death approached, the theological reality from which he took strength. That is the source of strength in our own lives, far greater than an ideology; we serve Jesus the Lord who is God. That is what kept Paul going.

He may be in chains as a criminal, suffering and facing death, but the Word of God is not bound. "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account." (Hebrews 4:12–13, ESV) No one can imprison God's Word. It cannot be bound. Still it is preached. Still it frees souls from death and sin to life and freedom in Christ. Still it melts the hardest of hearts. Still it gives strength to weary souls. Still it makes fools wise. Still it comforts the broken and convicts the sinful. Still it does its wondrous work of redeeming the humble and judging the proud. The Word of God is not bound nor can it be.

That's why it such a disaster when people lose confidence in the power of the Word of God to accomplish the spiritual work committed to the church. The Word works – it has behind it the

power of God. What else teaches us the truth about God? What convinces us that we are sinners in need of a Savior? What else offers us Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins? What else teaches us the way to worship, the way to live, and the way to serve God? What makes preaching, evangelism, and discipleship effective? It is the Word of God, unbound and empowered by the Spirit of God for the salvation and sanctification of God's people. It was this confidence in Christ and in the power of His Word that made Paul to say...

“Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” (2 Timothy 2:10, ESV) For the sake of all those chosen of God, yet to be saved through faith in Christ and through the preaching of the Word of God, Paul was willing to endure, to remain faithful no matter the cost. He knew he was part of something greater than himself. He endured for the sake of all who would come to believe through his endurance, so that they might receive the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

He finishes this section of the letter by reciting the hymn of Christ's faithfulness to His people, to Timothy and to us, the assurance that we can finish this race well. Just listen to this. It is beautiful.

“The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him;” (2 Timothy 2:11, ESV) When we came to Christ, we died to sin in Him. We died to what we once were; died to sinful autonomy and self rule and we received a new and indestructible life in Him. We exchanged death for life so that we might live by faith in him now, and live forever with Him in eternity.

More than that: “if we endure, we will also reign with him...” (2 Timothy 2:12a, ESV) Keep trusting in Jesus, stand fast, and endure, because when you do, you will reign with Him in glory. If you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and by His grace you endure to the end, you will judge men and angels on the last day, and you'll reign with Jesus Christ forever. My mind cannot really even conceive it. What incredible joy and wonder.

But then comes the warning: “if we deny him, he also will deny us;” (2 Timothy 2:12b, ESV) If we turn away from Christ, rejecting His gospel, rejecting the salvation that he offers; if we fully and finally turn away from Him, seeking another path to heaven which does not exist, He will deny us on the last day. There are a lot of ways to deny Christ – outright rejection and unbelief or the denying of Christ with our lives as the false professors of whom Paul spoke in Titus 1:16 saying: “They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.” (Titus 1:16, ESV) But the point is clear, if we deny Christ – His person, His all-sufficient sacrifice for sinners, His Lordship, as the settled disposition of our hearts and lives, the final and fatal and irrevocable rejection of Jesus Christ – that is the idea -- He will deny us on the Day of Judgment to our everlasting despair and shame. And from that warning then to this great promise.

“If we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.” (2 Timothy 2:13, ESV) Here’s the promise. Even if we do have the life of Christ in us and are striving to remain faithful, there are times when we falter, where we stumble and fall, where we are weak, where we lose our way, where we sin, sometimes grievously. In those times, Christ remains faithful. He restores us. He brings us back. He works through His divine power to bring us to repentance, to confession, to humility, to brokenness and then to restoration so that we can continue to walk with Him by grace. He remains faithful to us even when we are momentarily faithless because He cannot deny Himself. He cannot deny who He is, His character as Savior, Shepherd, and Lord. He cannot withdraw the salvation that He has given to His own, for that salvation is He, Himself. Christ's love to His Church, and His purpose towards her cannot change, because He cannot deny Himself, and His Church is His own body. He cannot deny who He is nor can He deny the covenant signed in His blood and promise that comes with it – I will be your God and you shall be my people. His faithfulness is bound up in His character. He remains faithful because He is faithful and unchanging in His grace toward His own.

Christ, by His faithfulness, will ensure that Timothy will remain faithful and that same promise is made to us as well. Here’s the truth beloved. We live in some very challenging times, trying times -- serious and soul testing times. This climate in which we live will serve to test the reality of our faith. It was that way with Timothy and it is that way with us. Whether we stand or fall will be determined by the things that Paul describes here. Will we strengthen ourselves in the grace that is in Jesus Christ? Will we pass on the gospel truth that we have been given? Will we seek to be unreservedly committed to Christ – the dedication of a soldier, the discipline of an athlete, and the diligence of a farmer? Will we stake our lives on the Lord Jesus Christ and all that He is for His people? This is what Paul called Timothy to and what Timothy embraced.

Will we do the same?

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