

BE STRONG IN GOD'S WORK

2 Timothy 2:1-10, 14-26

Sometimes we get the idea that we need to become stronger and more capable so that we can be more effective in the work of the kingdom of God for which we were saved. The question is not how can I grow stronger in God's work but is more appropriately stated as how can God's strength grow more effective in me? This question recognizes the truth of what God told Paul in 2 Cor. 12:9. "And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'" When we realize this, then we see that it is not in our "striving to be strong" but in our "surrender to His steering" that God's work is manifested.

One of the more important functions of a pastor is being a teacher and interpreter of God's word and message. The church can learn from the erosion of respect for teachers that has occurred in the secular world and so avoid such a deterioration for those in the ministry of the church. It used to be that school teachers were admired and were well compensated compared to what other people made in the community. It was not unusual that many young people going to college wanted to be teachers. Teachers were people that we looked up to and set a good role model for many kids. We can recall teachers who were dedicated to teaching and were really a credit to their profession.

It used to be that schools were under local control and the parents were involved. This authority has been usurped by the federal government and the unions. The result is that teachers do not have adequate authority in the classroom so that discipline can be maintained. Why? Perhaps it is because there have been a few teachers who abused their positions and their authority and the resulting caution and limitations have removed some the effectiveness of teachers. Another reason is that many of the teachers have sold out to the pursuit of higher wages rather than the pursuit of higher education standards. As a result, the education system has suffered and the really dedicated teachers have also suffered.

We could say pretty much the same thing about pastors as we have said for teachers. There has been a definite erosion of respect in our society for those that are in the pastoral and teaching ministry. Part of the problem in both areas is that those who are teachers must all "walk the talk" by living exemplary lives and they must be committed to their calling. Paul gave instruction to a pastor named Timothy as to how to carry out his teaching ministry.

Pass on the Faith – 2:1-2

¹You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ²The 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. 2 Timothy 2:1-2 (NASB95)

We can find our strength in "taking the moral high ground" (being strong in the law) or we can find our strength in the fact that we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and it is Christ Who is living His life through us (strength in the free, undeserved gift of God - grace).

God did not intend that pastors be the only teachers and proclaimers of the word. A pastor is to teach leaders (faithful and reliable men) that they may teach others. In doing so, he multiplies his ministry and its effectiveness. Unfortunately, the mind set in most churches today among the congregation and those who are in paid ministry roles is that only the pastor has the authority vested in himself to effectively teach and interpret the word of God. Anecdotal evidence of such thinking recently came up in a statement made by a pastor who quoted Acts 16:10 regarding Paul's visit to Macedonia: "After **he** had seen the vision, **we** sought to go." (Emphasis added by the pastor.) The interpretation applied by the pastor was that "Vision comes

to the leader, not the crowd. Then leaders lead.” Such thinking ignores the teaching Paul had in 1 Cor 14:26 where he wrote: “How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, **every one of you** hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.” (Emphasis added.) This kind of thinking shuts out the majority of the church from being able to be effectively heard in the church (as in 1 Cor 14:26) with the result that leadership and church governance is no longer by the Holy Spirit through the “congregation” (the church) but by executive order of the paid ministry staff. This is the same kind of thinking that has infiltrated our civil governments in that the legislatures have been bypassed and the direction of our nation is no longer the will of the people but the philosophy of the executive branch.

Stay Focused – 2:3-10

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. ⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, ⁹ for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned. ¹⁰ For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus *and* with *it* eternal glory. 2 Timothy 2:3-10 (NASB95)

Hardship, suffering, and persecution are the realities of following God in a fallen world. When the Israelites entered the Promised Land of Canaan, they had just begun to fight. The enemies were entrenched and effort had been expended to drive them out. We are also in a battle and though God had given us the victory, the implementation of that victory has to be worked out. We are called to the work that God had foreordained that we should do. We have not been called to sit in the pews.

Regarding verse six, according to John Gill’s Expositor, “the words may be rendered, and which seems more agreeable to the context and to the apostle’s argument, ‘*the husbandman must first labor before he partakes of the fruits*’; so a minister of the Gospel must first labor, and endure hardships in this life, before he sits down in the kingdom of heaven, and takes his rest, and enjoys the crown of glory, which fades not away, which the chief Shepherd shall give unto him.”

The word God gives to us is rich and full and is such that we cannot get all the benefit from it by causal reading. We need to meditate and reflect on it. We need to think about it in relationship to everyday application in life and let it come alive to us and work the transformation God want to accomplish in us.

Previously Paul had encouraged Timothy to take the things he had heard of him and teach them to others. The incarnation of God the Son in Jesus, His death and all that is related to it and the fact that He was the fulfillment of the prophecies related to the “son of David” are examples of the teaching that should be passed on to others.

The full extent of this message is so revolutionary it landed Paul in a Roman prison. However, God used even this to extend the gospel. Many of the letters of Paul (that make up much of the New Testament) were written from prison.

Teach the Truth – 2:14-15

¹⁴ Remind *them* of these things, and solemnly charge *them* in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless *and leads* to the ruin of the hearers. ¹⁵ Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:14-15 (NASB95)

One of the top priorities for pastor-teachers is to teach people to get their priorities straight. In other words, we need to put first things first. When a pastor starts concentrating on things other than the word of God and gets into church politics and power struggles with other people, then the congregation suffers and the spiritual life in the church dries up.

Part of the reason for **straying** away from the word of God in teaching is that the pastor-teacher is **staying** away from the word of God during his study. Paul's remedy for that is given in the instruction to "study to show thyself approved unto God." Sometimes pastors of traditional churches are more concerned about what the largest contributor thinks than they are about what God thinks. Our teaching should be pleasing unto God. I'm more concerned about a person missing out on God's blessings or spending eternity in hell than I am interested in that person feeling good about the message.

I would think that some pastors would be embarrassed by the errors they put forth in the pulpit. I have heard preachers make statements that are absolutely contrary to the word of God. I have heard some give messages that completely miss the point of a passage of scripture. Again, the reason is lack of concentration on and in the word during their preparation time. Too many times, a person goes into a pastoral ministry as a profession rather than being called to it. As a consequence, his teaching ministry will suffer (as well as everybody that listens) because he does not have the spiritual insight to "rightly divide the word of truth."

Avoid Things that Hinder – 2:16-21

¹⁶ But avoid worldly *and* empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, ¹⁷ and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, ¹⁸ men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some. ¹⁹ Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness." ²⁰ Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. ²¹ Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these *things*, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. 2 Timothy 2:16-21 (NASB95)

I have known of churches that are so concerned about who is the anti-christ that they try to determine by numerology if every world leader has a name that could be represented by the numbers 6 6 6. Others have spent untold hours trying to figure out when the Jews are going to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem because that (to them) will signal the start of events leading up to the Second Coming. Some groups will argue that there is no hell. Others claim that only 144,000 Jews will be in heaven. Concentrating on such issues to the neglect of the necessity of knowing God and being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ and living under His Lordship so that we are being purified and made ready to live with Him forever prevents us from achieving the potential that God has for us.

The presence of sin in the life of a Christian hinders his usefulness to God. Every Christian should want to be all that God wants him to be. We should want to be useful and pleasing to God. If we are not, then we miss the fullness of the blessings of our salvation in Christ Jesus.

Be Gentle and Patient – 2:22-26

²² Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love *and* peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. ²³ But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. ²⁴ The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, ²⁵ with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and they may come to their senses *and escape* from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:22-26 (NASB95)

The call to ministry carries with it great responsibility for righteous living. A pastor should run away from certain things because temptations can be very strong. On the other hand, there are many good virtues to cultivate in one's life. Righteousness is simply right standing with God. It is a result of having been declared righteous by God because of the redemption bought for us by Jesus and of letting Jesus live His righteous life through us. Faithfulness implies integrity and being trustworthy. Love (Charity in KJV) is self-sacrificing love which, when applied to life's situations with integrity and with the wisdom that comes from the presence of God in our lives, will bring peace to us and those with whom we interact.

If there is to be strife in a church, then it should be about something truly significant rather than over issues that do not really matter. The question that we should ask in such situations is "Does God really care about that?" If it doesn't matter to God, then it shouldn't matter to the serious Christians in the church.

We should not take sides in such foolish arguments but keep concentrating on the truth. In this way, those that have gotten themselves entangled in such matters can eventually see the light and escape from the trap that the devil set to sidetrack the real work of the church.

We don't want to miss the point that each of us has responsibility to teach others about Jesus and God's plan of salvation for every person. We should also help each other grow into the fullness of Christ Jesus by sharing with and teaching each other.