

TTS Scripture S7 – 2 Tim 2:1-13

2 You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; 2 and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well. 3 Share in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No one serving in the army gets entangled in everyday affairs; the soldier's aim is to please the enlisting officer. 5 And in the case of an athlete, no one is crowned without competing according to the rules. 6 It is the farmer who does the work who ought to have the first share of the crops. 7 Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in all things.

8 Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David—that is my gospel, 9 for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. 10 Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. 11 The saying is sure:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

12 if we endure, we will also reign with him;

if we deny him, he will also deny us;

*13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful—
for he cannot deny himself. [2 Tim 2:1-13]*

'Strength and Strategy'

1. Strength

Paul is aware that he has not got long before he goes to be with Christ in glory. Those that he leaves behind are entering the time of transition between the Apostolic and post-Apostolic church. In this letter, Paul is urging Timothy to fulfill his calling, to faithfully take the 'baton' as it were, from Paul, of the responsibility of teaching the 'full counsel of God' as he has received it from Paul and likewise pass it on to faithful men, who will teach others, thus ensuring the growth of the Gospel and maintaining its Apostolic orthodoxy through the generations.

On the face of it, however, things look bad, especially for Timothy in Ephesus. There has been a significant defection of people from the church in Asia, heretics are seeking to undermine the Gospel and Timothy, at first sight, would not appear to be your number one choice to hand over the precious deposit which Paul goes on to speak about. Paul would not be surprised by this however, nor would he be discouraged. He understood that God's ways are not our ways, as he wrote to the Corinthian church:

"For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and

redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."
[1 Cor 1:26-31]

He then goes on immediately to say:

*"1 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 **And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling**"* [1 Cor 2:1-3]

Paul himself knew what it was to be fearful and trembling when bringing the Gospel to new territory, such as Corinth. He himself had had memorable and ongoing experience of the very grace which he is now exhorting Timothy to lay hold of and be strengthened by. Luke records one such example of Christ's faithfulness and grace to Paul while he was in Corinth, preaching the Gospel 'in weakness and in fear and much trembling':

"9 And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, 10 for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." [Acts 18:9-10 ESV]

Near the end of this second letter to Timothy, Paul recounts another instance of Christ's faithfulness and sustaining grace when everyone had deserted him:

"At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! 17 But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. 18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen." [2 Tim 4:16-18]

No wonder then, that in chapter 1 of 2 Timothy, Paul is able to say, totally congruently: 'But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.' Thus, in light of all the desertions and setbacks they have suffered recounted in chapter 1, Paul re-iterates: "**You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.**" [2 Tim 2:1] He is urging Timothy to make sure that he avails himself of the help, the strength, the power, the wisdom, the courage, the comfort that is available to him through the grace that is his in Christ Jesus. This grace is available to all believers, through our union with Christ.

We see Paul encouraging the Colossian believers in the same way (Col 1: 11 "*being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience **with joy***" [Col 1:11]), as well as the believers in Ephesus ("*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might*" [Eph 6:10]). On this very verse, Peter O'Brien says the following:

"The first imperative, 'be strong', is best understood as a passive, **meaning 'be made strong, be strengthened'**. This fits with the corresponding passive in the prayer of 3:16, 'that you may be strengthened with power through his Spirit', and indicates that **believers do not empower themselves**, even if they are to heed the apostolic injunction and lay hold of the divine resources available to them.

Rather, their strengthening comes from an external source, which the following phrase indicates is the Lord Jesus. He is the person with whom believers have been brought into union (cf. 2:21; 4:1, 17; 5:8; 6:1, 21), and thus the sphere in whom they now live their Christian lives and from whom they derive their strength. They no longer fall under the tyranny of the prince of the power of the air (2:2), but have come under Christ's loving rule and headship. **For this reason they can be urged to 'be strengthened in him': he supplies all they need in their spiritual warfare.**

The call to be 'strong' in the midst of a battle has a number of Old Testament precedents, the most notable of which is Joshua, who was urged to 'be strong and of good courage' (Josh. 1:6, 7, 9; cf. Deut. 31:6, 7, 23). In a critical situation David, too, 'found strength in the Lord' (1 Sam. 30:6), while later God says of his people gathered home from exile, 'I will make them strong in the Lord' (Zech. 10:12). The latter examples mention explicitly that the external source of this empowering is 'the Lord', and in Ephesians this refers to the Lord Jesus."

[Peter O'Brien, *New Testament Commentary on Ephesians*]

Calvin comments on Eph 6:10:

"10. Finally. Resuming his general exhortations, he again enjoins them to be strong, — to summon up courage and vigor; for there is always much to enfeeble us, and we are ill fitted to resist. **But when our weakness is considered, an exhortation like this would have no effect, unless the Lord were present, and stretched out his hand to render assistance, or rather, unless he supplied us with all the power.**

Paul therefore adds, **in the Lord.** As if he had said, "You have no right to reply, that you have not the ability; for all that I require of you is, be strong in the Lord." To explain his meaning more fully, he adds, in the power of his might, which tends greatly to increase our confidence, particularly as it shews the remarkable assistance which God usually bestows upon believers. **If the Lord aids us by his mighty power, we have no reason to shrink from the combat.** But it will be asked, What purpose did it serve to enjoin the Ephesians to be strong in the Lord's mighty power, which they could not of themselves accomplish? I answer, there are two clauses here which must be considered. He exhorts them to be courageous, **but at the same time reminds them to ask from God a supply of their own deficiencies, and promises that, in answer to their prayers, the power of God will be displayed.**"

[Calvin's *Commentary on Ephesians*]

Paul's 'promise' here, to the Ephesians, is based on solid experience. He had experienced this grace, manifesting in many forms, during his ministry, as indeed, had many of his companions, as we can see in the book of Acts and in Paul's own letters. We see an example of this in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians: "*For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.*" [2 Cor 1:5] The key though, to experiencing this strengthening grace is to not draw back. As Paul has already exhorted Timothy in Chapter 1:7: "*for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.*"

Where this grace is concerned **'we have to be in it to win it'**. The grace to 'go through', to endure is rarely present until the need for it is there. Peter would never

have imagined that water could sustain his weight until he stepped out and onto it, in response to Christ's command. When God calls us to do something we need to respond in trust and obedience, despite the fact we may feel fearful or 'in trembling', as even Paul admits to being, on many occasions. Yet, as he stepped in, as he obeyed, God's grace met him there. Paul speaks often of his consciousness of his own weakness, yet God taught him not to allow his 'weakness' to hinder him, but rather to act as a spur to throw himself more fully on God's grace:

*"Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." **Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.** 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."* [2 Cor 12:8]

This is absolutely counter-intuitive to much of the teaching of the Western culture that we live in and that even the Church is in danger of imbibing. The point is, that Paul grew in confidence, not in himself, but in God and so did not allow his felt weakness to make him timid, or to cause him to draw back and he wants Timothy to experience this same grace, as it is the only way that Timothy will be able to run his own race and fulfill his call, as Paul has done. Consider the exhortation of the writer of Hebrews:

"Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. 36 For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. 37 For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; 38 but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." 39 But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls." [Heb 10:35-39]

And what is it that gives us this confidence? The Gospel.

In the context of 2 Timothy, where so many have walked away from Paul and indeed from the faith, Paul is effectively saying to Timothy, his 'beloved child', 'we are not of those who shrink back.' Having therefore encouraged Timothy continually to be strengthened in God's grace (and we shall see as we go through this letter, the 'means of grace' that Timothy has available to him), Paul turns to the strategy that is to be followed by Timothy in ensuring the 'apostolic succession'.

2. Strategy

We have seen how, in 2 Tim 1, Timothy is instructed by Paul to:

"13 Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 14 By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you." [2 Tim 1:13-14]

Then he is to pass it on to faithful men, who will likewise guard it and pass it on:

- 2:1 You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus,

- **2 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.

Thus we see four stages in handing on the truth:

1. Christ to Paul;
2. Paul to Timothy;
3. Timothy to 'faithful men, apt to teach';
4. Faithful men to others also.

This is the true 'apostolic succession'.

"[The] succession from the apostles is to be more in the message itself than 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." [John Stott, *Guard the Gospel*]

Paul himself didn't 'draft' the Gospel, in the way that the founding fathers drafted the American Constitution. Paul himself says that he 'received' it:

*"Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. 3 **For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received:** that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures"* [1 Cor 15:1-4]

*"For I would have you know, brothers, **that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. 12 For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.**"* [Gal 1:11-12]

Just as God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai, even written by God's own finger, so Jesus revealed the Gospel to his disciples after his resurrection and he also revealed it in person, to Paul. It is Christ's gospel, not man's, just as it was God's Law, even though they used to describe it as the Law of Moses. It was given to Moses by God. Moses received it. Paul received it. We likewise receive it, by revelation. The OT Law received by Moses was to be stewarded, studied, meditated upon and applied. The Jewish Kings were not called primarily to be legislators, but faithful stewards of God's Law: see Dt 17:18 and the King's responsibility towards God's Law in Israel:

"And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. 19 And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, 20 that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel." [Deut 17:18-20]

The King of the Israelites was to be as much subject to the Law as his brethren. He was never to consider himself to be 'above the Law'. He is not so much a Law maker as a Law upholder. He too was to 'guard the deposit' he had been given and pass it on to future generations until the time came when He would fulfill the Law would come, full of grace and truth.

And now we ourselves have 'received' that grace and truth in the Gospel and like Timothy are to guard that good deposit and faithfully pass it on until the time that, by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, we too, can say like Paul:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

[2 Timothy 4:7]