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# Formation: Our Word Together

## 2 Timothy 2:1-26 <sup>1</sup>

*Russ Kennedy*

We become God's people by the Word and Spirit. We are born by the Word and Spirit. We are sustained by the Word and Spirit. We are shaped by the Word and Spirit. The Word is the center who and what we are. IT is through the teaching and preaching of God's Word that God's people are formed and framed. The community of faith was designed by God to a Word based, Word dependent, Word communicating, Word living community.

And so our commitment as a church and as elders to teaching things into existence...

This text is written to an elder and apostolic representative to stir up in him strength for the difficult tasks. So in many ways, this is a message aimed at our elders. But the underlying principles ought to shape all of us for whatever ministry God places us in.

### **In the Pattern of Understanding God's Ways** **(v.2-7)**

We are to be strong in the grace of Christ to what end? What will this enabling grace strengthen us for? This text weaves together the inward receiving of grace and its outward results...

<sup>1</sup> You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. <sup>4</sup> No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. <sup>5</sup> An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. <sup>6</sup> It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. <sup>7</sup> Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

The enabling grace of God strengthens us for the ways in which God calls, grows and develops the community of faith. Some of what God does is deep and profound. Some of what God does is clear and easily understood, particularly when illustrated from common everyday life.

### **Transferring Truth** **(v.2)**

Truth is transferred. It must be first learned and then taught. Every one of us is in this ever-expanding network of learning from others and then teaching what we learn to others. This is how the church's knowledge is deepened, broadened and spread down through time. This is why we are committed to teaching - through Biblical teaching

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God's people are sustained, strengthened and shaped. Last time we talked about the Faith, the doctrine that makes us who we are. You must be taught and you must live out the Faith. You cannot believe what you do not know. You cannot live out what you have not learned.

But there is careful qualification. The entrusting of truth to be taught to others is to *faithful* men. So what is in view here is the identifying, qualifying and ordaining of godly men to shepherd (pastor) the church as elders who teach. Much harm is done when unfaithful men are allowed to spread error. This is the essence of what happened in Ephesus that made Timothy's residence and ministry there necessary.

### ***Suffering Hardships***

***(v.3)***

Good soldiers suffer and endure hardships. It is the defining characteristic of a good soldier. Yet we as Christians think that we have been called to and what we are engaged in is a playground, not a battlefield. But Paul calls Timothy to endure hardships like good soldiers do.

Ben Patterson, Dean of Chapel at Hope College, in discussing this talked about not taking attacks and opposition and hardships personally. After all, soldiers don't peek up over the top of the foxhole and say, "Was it something I said?" Charles Simeon, a pastor in the 1800's was assigned a church to pastor that did not want him. The congregation who owned their pews (a common practice of the day) locked the pews. For 8 years, Simeon preached to a congregation forced to stand in the aisle. "Suffer hardship" from a man who was beaten, stoned, vilified and imprisoned. It is as poignant as hearing Josef Tson describe what he suffered for the sake of the gospel.

We are poised to suffer hardship in cultivating this community of faith through the teaching and preaching of God's Word. This may first fall on the elders, but it also may become a part of your way of life.

### ***Pleasing God***

***(v.4)***

The great inner drive that causes good soldiers to endure suffering is that we are utterly committed to pleasing God, our supreme commander. That enduring hardship, pleasing God hunger causes us to disentangle ourselves from daily distractions. Certainly this is true more for those who have given themselves to ministry. However, it seems to me that many of you see church as something you add to your life. The church is not your life. Do we make our great aim to please God in everything in every way?

### ***Obedying Rules***

***(v.5)***

Further, Paul points to athletics reminding us that competently serving God means understanding the guidelines and following them. We are not talking here about moral issues necessarily. What Paul is indicating here are those self-regulating parameters that we commit ourselves to as matters of wise ministry. It is the determination and discipline that focuses our energy and effort on finishing well. And there are dis-

ciplines (rules) that we must follow that may not be specific commands, but are evident. No one can minister well as God's athlete who does not read the Word, pray, participate in body life in worship, ministry and evangelism. Many try only to ultimately fail under pressure.

### ***Working Hard***

**(v.6)**

That brings us then to an encouraging pattern in God's ways. This is an allusion to the responsibility of a congregation to support hardworking elders. There is the sense of *oughtness* here. One who labors in the Lord's field ought to reap a harvest from that field. It also points to the fact that our hard labor in life and ministry for the sake of God and the gospel will not go unrecognized. Take hope, beloved, your hard work in serving God and His people will be rewarded.

### ***Thinking Deeply***

**(v.7)**

<sup>7</sup> Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

There is a sense in which this sentence is the other bookend of verses 1-2. Be strong in grace and pass on the truths you have learned to faithful men. Think deeply on what you have learned and God will give you insight. Timothy (and we) are to think carefully about these analogies in verses 3-6 and God will give us understanding as it relates our place in His providence. Reflect on the Word in the midst of our world. Once again we encounter that wonderful meeting of our exercise and God's enabling.

You do the thinking and God will give the understanding.

## **In the Privilege of Suffering for the Sake of Others**

**(v.8-13)**

Being strong by enabling grace means that we will embrace the privilege of suffering for the sake of God's people and the gospel.

<sup>8</sup> Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, <sup>9</sup> for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> The saying is trustworthy, for:

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

<sup>12</sup> if we endure, we will also reign with him;

if we deny him, he also will deny us;

<sup>13</sup> if we are faithless, he remains faithful—

for he cannot deny himself.

### ***Foundations in the Gospel***

**(v.8)**

At the center of the gospel is the divinity and humanity of Christ. The resurrection attested to His being God and to God's accepting of His finished work as complete. The lineage to David attested that He was truly human and established His credentials as the Messiah, the promised King. So we must constantly keep in mind the wonderful mystery of the incarnation as an essential part of the gospel. When we preach

Christ crucified, we do so as those who believe that He is both fully God and fully man, yet without mixing or mingling the humanity and deity.

So our preaching and teaching will be gospel centric. It will make large connections across both the Old and New Testaments. It will proclaim the gospel, not just in evangelism but also in edification. But you cannot be gospel centered without being Christ-centered. So we will cultivate the community of God's people through preaching and teaching that is centered on the Scriptures. The Scriptures are centered on Christ and the gospel.

Let us remind one another regularly: Jesus is risen and He is our Sovereign.

### ***Realities of Imprisonment***

***(v.9)***

Since that is so, it gives meaning and significance to the suffering and hardships that come with courage. Though Paul maybe imprisoned, the gospel is not chained. The power and propagation of the gospel does not depend on any single person, even a Paul. John Calvin wrote to several young ministers who were imprisoned for the gospel these words, "God will use your blood to sign His truth." I hope that will be true of us. Would it not be great to have the testimony here at the Chapel that these members signed God's truth with their blood?

### ***Motivations for Evangelism***

***(v.10)***

How does Paul view the hardships he endures? What does God's strengthening grace fill His heart and mind with? It fills it with a commitment to enduring because God is calling out His elect. Paul says, "I have chosen and I challenge you to choose to endure suffering for the sake of gospel because that gospel will be use to bring God's chosen to the eternal salvation planned for them." We can scarce think such a thing. In Acts 10, the fact that God has many people yet in Corinth is used to stir up courage to stand for the gospel in spite of threats against life.

### ***Statements of Consequence***

***(v.11-13)***

Here is Paul probably quoting a hymn or a widely circulated creedal statement. These are written as a series of commonly understood Christian truths, commonly held "If... then..."

For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him;

If we endure, we shall also reign with Him;

If we deny Him, He also will deny us;

If we are faithless, He remains faithful;

for He cannot deny Himself.

Here is the point. Our faithfulness in dying and enduring brings unimaginable reward. Our denying Him invokes His denial of us. But we can bank on the faithfulness of God even in our own faithlessness because HE cannot deny Himself.

After almost unimaginable trials as a pioneer missionary in the New Hebrides, John G. Patton wrote, "Our struggles are strangely mingled with success."

## **In the Problem of Wrangling over Words (v.14-19)**

So courage and conviction even to death are called for. But what must not emerge from this grace-enabled focus on preaching and teaching is self-important brashness that masquerades for Christian boldness.

<sup>14</sup> Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, <sup>17</sup> and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, <sup>18</sup> who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. <sup>19</sup> But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

### ***Futility of Word Strife (v.14)***

Holding to the standard of sound words (Ch.1) must not degenerate into all kinds futile arguing over words. The Greek literally reads striving with words. What is warned about is the going to war with words in a way that is futile and destructive of believers. Yes, we must stand for truth. But we must not use words as weapons to rip and ruin others. There is also a sense in which we must guard against the kind of theological wrangling that makes words stand alone apart from context. There is a way of approaching the Bible using word studies that can be useless, destructive and lead to error. Every significant doctrinal word in the Bible has to be understood in the ever widening circles of sentence, paragraph, book, redemptive historical and canon context. Believing this hugely affects the way I approach the Bible for preaching and polemics.

So the teaching and preaching must be true to the Scriptures. It must also be careful not to become an unhelpful battlefield. Yes, we must stand and battle for the truth. But there are ways to do that in language and tone that bring harm instead of help.

### ***Responsibility for Diligent Study (v.15)***

Over against the kind of poor use of the Word represented by verse 14 is the God approved diligent study that accurately handles the Word. We do not come to the Word in study to be signed and sealed by man. We are doing our study diligently, carefully and accurately because it is before the face of God.

***Danger of Contagious Error*****(v.16-18)**

Why is diligent study required? Why are we committed to the Word we preach? Because error is virulently contagious. While truth must be carefully and diligently studied, taught and propagated, error spreads like gangrene or AIDS. And unguarded, foolish talk is the primary agent for error's spread.

Notice in identifying what is happening in the church at Ephesus, Paul identifies how the error is being spread (v.16-17a), the people who are spreading the error (v.17b), the content of the error (v.18a) and the effects of the error (v.18b).

***Assurance by Heavenly Holiness*****(v.19)**

The point of verse 8 is to counter the *content* of the error and verse 19 the *consequences* of the error. Though error may upset the faith of some, it can never ultimately destroy the faith of those whom God knows, has chosen, called, saved and sealed and are evident now as those who abstain from sin. So our assurance stands on the firm foundation of God's work which produces holiness in us.

**In the Pursuit of Growing in Holiness****(v.20-22)**

All through the Bible, those who believe and especially those who teach error live impure and ungodly lives. They may have an external show of works righteousness, but not the inward reality that is its root. Further, the Bible shows us that living impure lives makes us even more vulnerable to believing untrue ideas.

<sup>20</sup> Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. <sup>21</sup> Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

<sup>22</sup> So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

***Understanding the Analogy*****(v.20)**

We must make a distinction between the category of vessels and the condition of the vessels. One has to do with how the God has constituted us; the other with how we have corrupted ourselves. So there are some in God's house (or Kingdom Community) who are wood, clay or gold pots. Each of us have been made to serve God differently. But some have become through error and sin corrupted vessels of dishonor.

***Dealing with our Sin*****(v.21)**

So our response is to prepare ourselves for every good work by cleansing ourselves from those corrupting, dishonorable things and become an honorable and useful vessel for God. The key is that we will be sanctified. And sanctified vessels are useful to the Master. This is part of what we want in our preaching and teaching. We want to cultivate in you a desire for and determination to be a clean vessel fit for the Lord's use.

### ***Pressing Forward Together***

**(v.22)**

Diligent effort will be called for. That emerges from the two verbs in this sentence: flee and pursue. Once again we recognize that holiness involves a negative and its opposite replacement. It is put off and put on. It is stop this and do this instead. It is flee the lusts of youth (even if you aren't young) and pursue the characteristics of holiness.

And we flee lust and pursue holiness *together*. If I am to grow in grace and be changed in life to become an honorable, sanctified, useful ready vessel, I must be fleeing and pursuing with others who are going hard after God with pure hearts. We aim to create a community of people who will surround one another in their pursuit of God and godliness along with other pure hearted lovers of God.

### **The Power of Ministering in Gentleness**

**(v.23-26)**

Time will probably prevent me from unpacking this as I would like. But here it is. Being strong in Jesus' grace manifests itself in a gracious, patient gentleness that is willing to keep on teaching while waiting for God to do His part in people's lives.

### ***Dangers from our Adversaries***

**(v.23)**

Make no mistake; this is in an adversarial environment. Timothy faces false teachers who will wage war with words, overwhelm with vain and empty chatter, distract with foolish and ignorant speculations and engender quarrels. They will wrong Timothy and will be in open opposition to him. So we are talking about loud, abusive, overbearing, public opposition aimed at overwhelming a young, timid elder.

The danger from these adversaries comes when we allow error to cause us to respond in a wrong way. We must reject foolish and ignorant "what-ifs" because we know that it stirs up squabbling and bickering.

In this abusive and abrasive atmosphere, look at what his attitude and actions are to be. And by the way, this is good counsel *regardless whether this atmosphere surrounds your leadership at church, at home or at work*.

### ***Humbleness in our Attitude***

**(v.24a)**

Any one in service to the King must have this very important attitude. It is utterly essential to those who serve as elders/pastors. We must see ourselves as God's bond-servants, His slaves. This is not to deny our sonship. It is a *both-and* not an *either-or*.

Maybe the fact that our modern translations no longer use the word *slave* to translate this word is actually a loss to us. When I am facing overwhelming opposition that may pose suffering and call for courage, I must simply view myself as God's slave.

### ***Characteristics of our Approach***

**(v.24b-25a)**

Now look at what grace enabled strength looks like in God's men and women.

Not quarrelsome – is not given to being easily stirred up to fight. He is not always looking for a fight. This is important. Courage is not brashness. Standing for truth

must not be rooted in pride. Frankly, we all know people like this: they love a good debate and will engage you at the least provocation.

Kind to all – how easy it is in the midst of suffering and opposition to become unkind. How easy it is when people we are responsible for disobey and rebel. Though this is aimed at elders, I also want to paint a target on parents and employers. Harsh, cutting and satirical slicing up others is loathsome. The only unkind words by Jesus recorded in Scripture are those spoken to hypocrites. Be kind to all.

Able to teach – Careful, able instruction is what is called for in the midst of Satan snared, willful opposition. We must teach our flocks, our opponents, our spouses and our children.

Patient when wronged – I have a simple question: are you? Elders when are you patient when someone misunderstands and opposes you? What about ministry leaders? Parents? What about you teens and kids? Does God's grace that enables you to see yourself as God's slave cause you to be patient?

Gentle correction – the word here refers to child training and chastening. With gentleness, we correct and chasten.

Once again, do not relegate this merely to doctrinal controversy or moral confrontation by elders. This text ought to shape all our interaction with others. Frankly, some of you sitting under the sound of my voice this morning need to hear and heed this with your spouses and children.

### ***Expectations in His Actions***

***(v.25b-26)***

How can we do this? Isn't it true that when we stand for truth and confront error and chasten wrong that what we are after often is self-vindication and we want others to change NOW! Sinfully, we demand from others what we ourselves often will not do.

Paul exhorts Timothy and through him, us, that we can be kind, able teachers, patient and gentle in our correction when we realize that it is God who must give them the power to change, repentance. Beloved, to all our counselors, you must have this truth screwed deeply in your heart. After all that you do with the Word, accurately handled and ably communicated, at the end of the day, true and lasting repentance leading to change *is what God and God alone does*.

And that repentance does two very important, distinct, yet connected things:

It causes them to acknowledge the truth. Any change that is not truth oriented is not God empowered change. This is true whether we are dealing implicitly with error and heresy or with sinful conduct.

It causes them to have an "awakening" in the soul (come to their senses) that frees from the devil's bondage. I think most of us have had this sort of thing happen in our own lives. We come to see – that is to believe by faith in the soul, some truth that illumines the trap our soul's enemy has laid for us.



What kind of people is Timothy confronting? What kind of opposition is he facing? He is facing the opposition of men and women who were ensnared by the devil and were doing the bidding of the enemy's will. This is where the power of the Word arising from purity in life and gentleness in method ministers so helpfully to others.

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## Reflect and Respond

Be strong in grace:

To think deeply on the Word and understand God's ways;

To choose and endure suffering for the sake of the gospel;

To diligent, God approved, study of the Word that avoids error and warring with words.

To pursuing holiness alongside other pure hearted Christians;

To ministering in the midst of opposition with kindness, able teaching, patience and gentle correction.

