

You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ²What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men^[a] who will be able to teach others also.

³Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in the concerns of civilian life; he seeks to please the commanding officer. ⁵Also, if anyone competes as an athlete, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶The hardworking farmer ought to be the first to get a share of the crops. ⁷Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

⁸Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead and descended from David, according to my gospel, ⁹for which I suffer to the point of being bound like a criminal. But the word of God is not bound. ¹⁰This is why I endure all things for the elect: so that they also may obtain salvation, which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. ¹¹This saying is trustworthy:

For if we died with him,

we will also live with him;

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

if we deny him, he will also deny us;

¹³if we are faithless, he remains faithful,

for he cannot deny himself.

True Discipline

Discipline isn't fun. I should know. I feel like I was an expert in it. Usually it meant, "Once again, you're in trouble and therefore need to learn a lesson." It can be painful to the backside or even the bank account. They're not generally enjoyable experiences that you want to do again and again. That's why it's a punishment.

That's not the discipline we're talking about today, but pain is involved. Paul isn't calling us to avoid this pain but rather to endure under it and this calls for true discipline. This is training to produce a specific pattern or behavior. Paul wants Timothy to remember Jesus and follow him no matter what pain, problems, or punishment.

But it's natural for us to not like pain, to avoid it at all costs. The world around us uses punishments and pain to teach us, "Don't do that again!" That's why we discipline and punish people with prison time and fines. And generally speaking we tend to live for peace and comfort while avoiding all pain and conflict. But God calls us to be faithful disciples. Being faithful doesn't involve compromise for the sake of safety. It calls for discipline so that we may always see Jesus.

And if anyone knew discipleship and discipline, it would be Paul. He had endured hardship. His face must have looked like a battlefield. And now he's in prison writing his last letter to Timothy. He knows he isn't getting out. The heat had intensified, the pressure had increased. He's in Rome, in the mid-60s, where Nero is the emperor. Paul isn't going to make it out and he knows it. He has fought the fight, finished the race, and now he knows it's only a matter of time.

He writes to Timothy, "*My son,*" underscoring the gravity of what he is about to say, "*be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*" But Paul isn't telling him to "Buck up," or "Be a man." But rather to be strengthened in the grace that is in Jesus Christ. This imperative is in the passive, which doesn't make sense to us. How can Timothy be made strong? We want him to make himself strong. Paul writes later, "*The Lord strengthened me,*" (2 Timothy 4:7) and early in Philippians 4:13, "*I can do all these things through him who strengthens me.*" Paul is aware that he is sustained and strengthened by Christ and His power.

That strength is found *in the grace that is in Christ Jesus*. Grace mediates God's gifts. It is obtained through the Word of God. This Paul says in Romans 10:17, "*Faith comes from hearing the message.*" Paul emphasizes hearing this word, "*What you have heard from me,*" Many translations then say, "*In the presence of many witnesses,*" but I prefer *through many witnesses*. In other words Timothy, you've heard this same message from me and many others. It's been one long bucket brigade and now it's your turn to participate. Pass it on *to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*"

This does not involve some isolated desert experience, no private revelations but a public proclamation of the truth. It is passed on to faithful men and relayed through faithful men.

Paul is disciplined. Instead of pouting and moaning and throwing a pity party, Paul reaches out to Timothy for when he will no longer be around and he repeatedly points to Christ Jesus. Paul is disciplining Timothy to turn to Christ Jesus no matter what. When suffering turn to Jesus. Embrace it for the sake of the gospel and he provides three examples of discipline in the face of pain. *A soldier, athlete, and farmer.* A soldier doesn't get entangled in civilian affairs. His concern is with the battlefield. An undisciplined watchman is useless. An athlete is disciplined in his event. He trains and then during the race he competes according to the rules so as not to be disqualified. He keeps his focus on the finish, not the pain. A farmer must plow, plant, weed, and water no matter how he feels the work must be done. He too is focused on the finish, the joy of the harvest. With singular focus, steadfast determination, discipline they press on.

I don't understand discipleship and discipline like the Apostle Paul. Everything I suffered in childhood was earned and deserved. But I do worry about the world in which we live. Persecution is growing. In the last few years we've seen pastors arrested for continuing to fight for a separation of church and state. The state has no say in how we worship. Maybe you see more on the horizon that makes you grow anxious and this distracts you from the fight, the race, the harvest.

Christians have suffered huge financial penalties for holding to their religious and moral beliefs. Some have even gone to jail. Are you ready to do that? We are called to the same single-minded devotion to our vocation in Christ that characterizes the service of a soldier, or the dedication of an athlete, or a hardworking farmer. But our interests are divided. We often live for something else not God but our glory and comfort. We want another way that leads to life without the cross. We want to follow after the epicurean spirit, "eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we may die." We want to avoid pain and discomfort. Which is why we reduce worship to a single hour and why do we need to sing all of the verses. In place of discipline we see it as drudgery.

But there is a point to the repetition. It's to prepare you. Discipline you for a time when people like Paul are not around. This true discipline intends to produce a specific pattern or behavior that always turns to Christ Jesus, to him and his church. Because the danger we face is real. The temptation is to fight alone, depend on our own strength and stamina to get us by and in so doing miss out on the harvest. It takes discipline and that is found by gathering together with the church, for the sake of the elect. It's found in the assembly of the saints.

This isn't so we can whip people into an emotional frenzy. This isn't a locker room pep-talk, "Be strong." Instead Paul points to where strength can be found. It's not in your inner resolve, your own discipline. It's found in Christ alone. Paul calls out to Timothy, "Don't forget the mission. Yes, I'm going to die. Nero is now taking on Christianity. I told you this day would come but this is more important than you or me." *Entrust this to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead and descended of David, according to my gospel. This is the first and only time that Paul refers to Jesus Christ in 2nd Timothy. 12x Paul refers to Christ Jesus, but here Jesus Christ. Here he emphasizes the humanity, *risen from the dead, and descended from David, according to my gospel.* Jesus came down from heaven. He soldiered on through suffering and he competed according to the rules (the qualifications) and he won. He is the first fruits of those risen from the dead and he will come again. This is the message that has been passed on to Paul and Paul passed on to Timothy. This is the same faith handed down through Lois and Eunice. This is the faithful witness through many. This is the Gospel Paul proudly calls his own and for which he now suffers to the point of being bound like a criminal. But he writes, *"The Word of God has not been bound."* Perfect passive. Though

they attempt to silence it, imprison it, and destroy it – they cannot stop God’s Word and his grace going out to the nations.

Paul on the other hand can be imprisoned. In Rembrandt’s painting of Paul in prison, he is haggard, worn out, poured out, his books are piled next to him as he sits alone in a dungeon, with a thousand yard stare, thinking about what’s next. He looks like he knows, but even there in the darkest dungeon, the light shines forth. God’s Word, the sword of the spirit stands at his side. Paul is still preaching the good news *so that the Gospel has been made known to the entire palace guard* (Philippians 1:13,14). . He is still sending out letters, *“This is why I endure all things for the elect: so that they also may obtain salvation, which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.”*

The reason Paul suffers as he does is for the church. Paul says, “I’m here because of the gospel, not because I messed up or because God’s Word has failed. If this is where I need to be so that others are served, so be it. This is where I want to be.” He then breaks out in another trust worthy saying that may be a hymn or part of their baptismal liturgy but either way it confesses the faith in Jesus. *For if we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.”* The first person plural is used as a group confesses Christ. No matter how unfaithful his people may be, God does not lie. He will not break his oath or abandon the promise of life and eternal blessing. But this trustworthy saying also entails judgment if his faithfulness is not believed. This gracious God is also just. This tension is reconciled at the cross where Jesus took upon himself the sin of the world.

God remains faithful when you fall. God remains faithful when we are unfaithful. This isn’t about you. It’s about the gospel, Jesus for you. Jesus is the one who motivates us to endure pain and persecution. Jesus is the one who disciplines us so that we may stand. Jesus is the one who kept Paul faithful until the point of death. Paul writes, *“I have fought the fight, finished the race, I have kept the faith.”* He is part of the harvest of righteousness.

If there is any training, any discipline to endure for all time, *“Remember Jesus, risen from the dead.”* We are safe and secure in him, not because our faithfulness or good works but because of Christ Jesus. We died with him in baptism. That is an accomplished fact. It’s written in the past tense. If you died with him, and you did, you will also live with him. That’s a promise. If you endure with him, you will also reign with him.

That is the only way we are strengthened to endure the difficulties ahead, *“By the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”* And this is the only way that we are strengthened for whatever we may face. The grace that is in Christ Jesus. The grace he gives through Word and Sacrament. The tools with which the Holy Spirit works faith to believe as well as strength to endure. He forgives. He restores. He is faithful to us. We may be called to suffer for the sake of the gospel but no matter where Jesus leads, it isn’t a mistake. You haven’t messed up. God’s Word has not failed.

And even if you find yourself in a cold dark cell you can remember Jesus and entrust him to others. Remember Jesus when there is bad news about your health. Remember Jesus when you are bound to your bed, not because of prison sentence but because your body no longer allows you the freedom you once had. Remember Jesus when times are tough and the economy is in shambles. Remember Jesus and rest in his grace for his faithfulness never fails. He cannot deny himself.

Discipline is not fun, neither is suffering but we endure because God has trained us in his word, created and strengthened faith in our hearts and he reminds us that the dangers we fear cannot harm you. Christ has risen from the dead. He is risen and you will rise too. Amen.