

2 Timothy: 2:1-13 Following Jesus is hard but it comes with great strength and reward

Living life with God is at times very frustrating and very difficult. Sometimes it feels like He's not protecting us, like He's not coming to the rescue. So the thought of facing what's in front of us is too terrifying. There is real danger, there is real disappointment, so what do we do about this? God not only says that we can and will survive it, He says that He'll be with us every step of the way. And even if we lose our life in the process, we still end up winners.

2:1-2, [Since Timothy still genuinely trusts God and possesses God's Spirit of power, God's call to teach people about Jesus' promise of life, and Paul's sound method of teaching it and since he also knows that God rewards the faithful and not the unfaithful, even though they may suffer and die] God urges Timothy to stand strong in the face of all his fears and opposition by means of the grace, i.e., the favor, the support that Jesus will give him. Showing people how to live Jesus' promise of life, how to be Christ-like, comes with opposition but God's support awaits us. Also, Paul has passed something down to Timothy—he disciplined him in the way of Christ—so he now asks Timothy to do the same for the next generation of men who will lead the church, who will in turn do the same for the next generation, and so on. Thus, being a disciple of Jesus means that you disciple others who disciple others. There is one thing 2:2 implies: pastors were always supposed to be produced by the local church not Bible colleges and seminaries.

2:3-7, there are two themes running through this: endurance and reward (endurance actually shows up in 2:1 with the words “be strong,” in fact, endurance and reward has been there from 1:1). So now God uses three different examples of someone who endures and is then rewarded: a soldier endures by focus and discipline and is rewarded with pleasing his superior (who will likely promote him). An athlete knows he can't cheat but must play by the rules, which means that he has to endure a lot of hard training because he will not be allowed to cut corners in competition (cf. Phygellus and Hermogenes, 1:15—if you cut corners, you won't be rewarded by the Lord when He returns). Having competed and won according to the rules, the athlete is then rewarded with a crown (first prize and everything it brings). A farmer must endure a lot of hard work if he's to be rewarded with being the first to eat of his crops (or the reward of a profit once he sells his crops).

Paul urges Timothy to consider all this, to carefully meditate on what God is telling him about endurance and reward. If he considers this carefully, the Lord will give him understanding in all these things. Our job is to think about our daily life with God by our side. His thinking, not ours or Satan's, is supposed to define the world around us and give us our marching orders.

2:8, God points to the ultimate Endurer, the ultimate Overcomer, the ultimate Soldier, Athlete, and Farmer: Jesus Christ. And note what He calls Him: the “Seed of David.” Why does God mention this of Jesus? He wants there to be no misunderstanding whom He's talking about. It's not just any “Jesus,” or “Joshua,” or “Insous” whichever language you use. We're talking about Jesus, the promised Messiah that was to come from the line of David (2 Samuel 7:12-13).

“Was raised from the dead according to my gospel,” why mention this? What's the danger and fear Timothy faces right now? Persecution and death, Nero's persecution of Christians, his killing of Christians, and Paul is next; he's on death row. This is why He mentions Jesus' resurrection, i.e., Jesus was killed but death couldn't hold Him because He is life (John 14:6). Jesus abolished death and made eternal life available through the Gospel!! (1:10), which is why neither Timothy nor any other Christian has to fear any persecution, any death. But there's something else, what's one of the themes that runs through this passage? Reward. What happened when Jesus was resurrected? What was God's prediction of David's greater Seed in 2 Samuel 7:12-13? He would rule the world! For His endurance, His life of suffering and death, God rewarded Jesus with ruling the world (Psalm 2; Ephesians 1:20-21).

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2:9, next Paul points to himself. He's suffering, he's enduring the accusation of evildoer and the imprisonment that goes with it. But although he's in chains in a Roman dungeon awaiting execution, God's Word is not chained, i.e., no persecution, no suffering, not even death can stop the Word of God from bringing life to all who believe and live by it.

2:10, in light of the fact that Jesus has power over death, that nothing can stop God's Word from bringing life to all who believe it, Paul endures everything that he's going through so that others like Timothy, the elect of God, can experience the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, the salvation that comes with eternal glory. What salvation is God talking about here? What salvation has He been talking about since the beginning of this letter? What's the danger in chapter one, what salvation does Timothy need? Timothy's in danger of giving in to his fear and as a result being ashamed to preach the Gospel of life in Christ Jesus. If he turns his back on Christ like all the Christians in Asia have, then he will not be rewarded by the Lord, 1:15. However, if he remains faithful to the Lord, then the Lord will reward him when He returns, 1:16-18. In 2:11-13, God goes on to spell out what He means by the "eternal glory" that accompanies this salvation.

2:11-13, some believe this passage is talking about the possibility of losing your eternal salvation. They see God saying that if we don't endure, if we fail to live a good life, then He will deny us our eternal salvation. But this couldn't be further from the truth. This passage actually assures us that even if we fail to endure, God still keeps His promise of life. Paul starts by stating God's ironclad promise, i.e., if we died with Christ, then we are assured to live with Him. That is, everyone who simply believes in Jesus Christ and therefore has been identified with His death, burial and resurrection (as Paul says elsewhere, Romans 6:4; Ephesians 2:5-6) is guaranteed to live with Him forever. After all, the life Jesus gives for believing in Him is eternal (John 6:47).

In 2:12, having settled the life and death question concerning eternity, Paul goes back to the themes he's been talking about since the beginning of the letter: endurance and reward. That is, now that you're a child of God and have His Spirit beating inside you, 1:14, what will you do with the life He gave you? If you happen to be faithful to Him and endure whatever hardships your Christian life brings (compare Phygellus and Hermogenes with Onesiphorus, 1:15-18), then the Lord will reward you with reigning with Him. This is why the salvation Paul mentions in 2:10 is one that comes with eternal glory because the rewards Jesus gives you last for all eternity. It's like an Olympic athlete setting a world record which no one ever breaks; he wins in such an incredible fashion that his glory lasts for decades, even centuries. Well, the rewards (and their glory) that the Lord gives us will last forever. However, if we deny Him, then He will also deny us. The question we need to ask here is this, "Deny Him what?" and "Deny us what?" What does the immediate context say, what's the immediate context talking about? What does the surrounding context say, what's He been talking about from the beginning of the letter? Endurance and reward. If we deny Jesus our endurance, then He will deny us our reward.

In 2:13, if we are faithless, if we actually stop believing in Him, He remains faithful. Why? Because He cannot deny Himself. Why does He word it this way? Because the moment we believe in Jesus we are made a permanent part of His Body (Ephesians 2:5-6). This is why Christians are called the Body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:11-16). And for Jesus to deny us after we've been made a permanent part of Him, would be to deny Himself. It would be like cutting off His arm, which He cannot do, which He would never do. He is not going to deny Himself.