

**Bethel Christian Fellowship  
Fair Lawn, NJ**

**The Message of 2 Timothy (6): “Grace Is Still Amazing”  
2 Timothy 2:1-2**

**May 21, 2023**

One of the most simple prayers we could ever pray is the children’s dinner prayer: “God is *great*, God is *good*, and we thank Him for our food.” But it’s also a prayer that’s quite profound. Why? Because it’s virtually impossible to thank God for His greatness and His unlimited power *without* proceeding to thank Him for His goodness.

Children, of course, don’t realize this; but as one theologian has reminded us, God, though great, “might conceivably be an immoral or amoral being, exercising His power and knowledge in a capricious or even cruel fashion” (Millard Erickson, Christian Theology). That’s why being thankful for God’s greatness must be linked to God’s goodness.

When the Bible refers to the “goodness” of God it means, quite simply, that He is benevolent. In the words of Dr. Sam Storms, “God’s goodness is but the inclination and resolve of His nature to promote the welfare and happiness of His creatures . . . God’s goodness as manifested in the restoration of the wretched is what the Bible calls “mercy.” Likewise, God’s goodness as manifested toward the guilty and undeserving is referred to as “grace” (The Grandeur of God). It’s this latter display of the goodness of God that is before us in the opening verses of 2 Timothy 2.

Previously, Paul has said that the power of God “*has saved us and called us to a holy calling – not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*” (1:9-10). That’s one of the finest expositions of God’s saving grace found anywhere in the New Testament.

But Paul also found encouragement and strength to face his daily trials by drawing upon God’s *sustaining* grace. When writing to the Corinthians, for example, he emphasized that this grace was the source of his strength; “*And by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I but the grace of God that was with me*” (1 Cor. 15:10). This becomes the underlying reason for Paul’s encouraging words to young Timothy; “*You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others*” (2:1-2).

The first thing to note is the smooth transition from the previous verses of the first chapter (1:15-18). As we know, that chapter ended with Paul’s sad commentary on the widespread defection among Christians in the Roman province of Asia (1:15), with Onesiphorus and his household being outstanding exceptions (1:16-18). “*You then, my son,*” (NIV) or “*You therefore, my son*” (NASB) - in light of the spiritual landslide all around you - “*be strong.*” It’s as if Paul is saying, “never mind what other ‘Christians’ may be doing or thinking; never mind how other ‘churches’ may be operating. As for *you*, Timothy, be *strong* . . .; stand your ground, and resist the prevailing mood of the day.”

This is the first of several exhortations in which Timothy is called to be *different*. In the words of John Stott, “He is not to yield to the pressures of public opinion or to the spirit of his age, but rather to stand firm in the truth and the righteousness of God. In my judgment nothing is more needed in today’s world and church than this same courage” (Guard the Gospel). Truer words were never written (1973). Today, Joel Osteen rarely, if ever, preaches about sin; T.D. Jakes endorses a homosexual lifestyle, and Andy Stanley is now baptizing transgender members of his “church.” The list goes on and on.

Second, it’s also important to realize that if Paul’s exhortation had stopped there, he would have been wasting his breath (or his ink and parchment). To tell someone as young (1 Tim. 4:12), and as frail (1 Tim. 5:23), and as fearful (2 Tim. 1:7) as Timothy to “be strong” would have been absurd – without adding, “in the grace that is in Christ.” The NEB provides an expanded translation of Paul’s summons: “*Take strength from the grace of God which is ours in Christ Jesus.*” Clearly, grace is still amazing – it’s not only the *source* of our salvation; it’s the *resource* for whatever task God has called us to do.

Many years ago, Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote a wonderful devotional on this amazing grace that is ours “in Christ Jesus.” Here are his thoughts for the morning of March 15, found in the daily readings from Morning and Evening:

Christ has grace without measure in Himself, but He hath not retained it for Himself. As the reservoir empties itself into the pipes, so hath Christ emptied out His grace for His people. ‘Of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.’ He seems only to have in order to dispense to us. He stands like the fountain, always flowing, but only running in order to supply the empty pitchers and the thirsty lips which draw nigh unto it. Like a tree, He bears sweet fruit, not to hang on boughs, but to be gathered by those who need. Grace, whether its work be to pardon, to cleanse, to preserve, to strengthen, to enlighten, to quicken, or to restore, is ever to be had from Him freely, and without price; nor is there one form of the work of grace which He has not bestowed upon His people. As the blood of the body, though flowing from the heart, belongs equally to every member, so the influences of grace are the inheritance of every saint united to the Lamb; and herein there is a sweet communion between Christ and His Church, inasmuch as they both receive the same grace. Christ is the head upon which the oil is first poured; but the same oil runs to the very skirts of the garments, so that the meanest saint has an unction of the same costly moisture as that which fell upon the head. This is true communion when the sap of grace flows from the stem to the branch, and when it is perceived that the stem itself is sustained by the very nourishment which feeds the branch. As we day by day receive grace from Jesus, and more constantly recognise it as coming from Him, we shall behold Him in communion with us, and enjoy the felicity of communion with Him. Let us make daily use of our riches, and ever repair to Him as to our own Lord in covenant, taking from Him the supply of all we need with as much boldness as men take money from their own purse.

Spurgeon’s point, which is Paul’s point, is that God’s enabling grace comes from a relationship with Jesus Christ. The more we abide in Christ, and His words abide in us (John 15:7), the more God’s grace flows to us. It is *impossible* to be strong in the grace that is *in* Christ Jesus if we are not in daily communion *with* Christ Jesus.

The third thing to note is the task that Paul has summoned Timothy to do. Contrary to the mindset of so many ministers in this country, the goal is *not* to build bigger buildings that will hold larger crowds. Nor is it to raise more money to accommodate larger church payrolls, or to promote more programs for the youth and young adults. Rather, Timothy is called to a *different kind* of ministry, for which he will need to be strengthened by God's grace. It's a ministry that is centered on *preserving* and *passing on* the Word of truth. "If the disloyalty of the Asian church made it imperative that Timothy should guard the truth with loyalty, the approaching death of the apostle made it equally imperative that Timothy should make arrangements for the handing down of the truth intact to the next generation. In this transmission of truth from hand to hand Paul envisages four stages" (John Stott):

1. The truth was entrusted to Paul by the risen Christ. In his very first epistle Paul wrote: "*I want you to know brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ*" (Gal. 1:11-12).

2. What has been entrusted to Paul by Christ has been entrusted to Timothy by Paul; "*And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses . . .*" (v. 2a). The reference to the "many witnesses" would seem to refer to Paul's instruction which Timothy had heard on Paul's second and third missionary journeys, and during his first Roman imprisonment (Acts 16-28; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; Philemon 1:1). This indicates that the apostolic faith was not handed down privately to Timothy; it was a public instruction. The many witnesses who heard it, therefore, could check Timothy's teaching against Paul's.

3. What Timothy has heard from Paul he is now to . . . "*entrust to faithful men*" (v. 2b). (Evidently there were some left among the many deserters of Asia.) The men Paul primarily has in view are the elders of the churches, whose chief function would be to teach sound doctrine and to refute those who oppose it (Titus 1:9). Without this faithful handling of God's Word by the leadership of the church, the church would never spiritually flourish.

4. The faithful men entrusted with the Word are the sort of men "*who will also be qualified to teach others . . .*" (v. 2c). Elders must be able to teach and preach (1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17), to direct the affairs of the church (1 Tim. 3:5; 5:17), to shepherd ("pastor") the flock of God (Acts 20:28) and to guard the church from error (Acts 20:28-31). This is an impossible task apart from the *enabling* grace of God which is ours "*in Christ Jesus.*"

What Paul envisions is the true, biblical "apostolic succession." It focuses on the message that's handed down, rather than on the men who teach it: from Christ to Paul, from Paul to Timothy, from Timothy to faithful men and from faithful men to "others also." This apostolic message is now found in the New Testament, which the church hands down from generation to generation. We praise God that a previous generation founded this church in 1926, and that they were strengthened by His grace to preserve the truth of God's Word for the next generation – who were strengthened to pass it on to us. We also praise God that *we* can be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, so that what *we* have heard, *we* can entrust to others also. Grace is still amazing!