

**“WHAT IN THE WORLD SHOULD WE DO?”**  
**2 TIMOTHY 2:1-8**

In **Romans 13**, God explains the provision He has made for care and protection of people civilly through the government. What should the government do (Rom. 13)? This is **the context** of living in this (political) world:

- ✓ **Government is given by God to restrain (and punish) evil (v. 3a)**
  - When people do things that are immoral and socially reprehensible, they *should be* terrified of the actions of the government against them. Government *should* create fear in the hearts of lawbreakers when they break the law. That’s one function of government.
  - If government is immoral, then every man will do what is right in his own eyes, and the culture will be destroyed (e.g., Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; **21:25**). “If there is no governmental authority to stop evil people, evil simply increases.” [Grudem, *Politics*, 78]
- ✓ **Government is given by God to promote good (v. 3b)**
  - Government should reward and affirm things that are right and that are consistent with moral goodness and godliness. Government should affirm the moral choices and actions of the people.
  - Government should “reward” obedience and establish laws and practices that make it conducive for people to do good.
  - Government also promotes good by defending the weak and defenseless (**Ps. 82:2-4**). It pays special attention to those who cannot defend themselves, using their power to stop the wicked from harming others (cf. also Dan. 4:27).
- ✓ **Government is given by God to be a temporal avenger of evil (v. 4)**
  - The government is given the responsibility of protecting people by punishing evil deeds to the point of using deadly force against evil.
  - We regularly complain about injustice: one way that the Lord takes care of injustice is by mediating His wrath through the just actions of the government against evil and sin.
- ✓ **Government is provided for by God (to do its work of benefitting people) through taxes (v. 6)**
  - Taxes aren’t a manmade system — they are a God-ordained system so that officials have resources they need to carry out their responsibilities of restraining evil and promoting good.
  - N.B. — The taxes are not for the selfish consumption of the rulers, but they are for restraining evil and promoting good.
- ✓ **Every government is established by God and should act as His servant (vv. 1, 4)**
  - Every government and every person in every government exists because God established it.
  - God is sovereign over both the governmental entities and the governmental leaders. All of them. There are no renegade governments. Cf. **2 Chron. 20:6**; Jer. 27:5-6; Dan. 4:17, 25, 32.
  - This does not mean that every government is “God blessed,” but it does mean that God has put every government in its place to accomplish His purposes (e.g., Nebuchadnezzar, Augustus...).
  - This is our comfort; no government is ruling accidentally; they have all been placed by God.

In our own country and in much of the world we regularly see abuses of these principles —

- ✓ Evil and wicked people often evade justice in the court system and evil seems to proliferate.
- ✓ Laws are not set up to protect innocent and good people and actions — good actions aren't rewarded.
- ✓ Government too often doesn't avenge evil but seems to promote evil — we can give too many examples (in our country and many others) of the government "giving hearty approval to those who practice [things worthy of death]" (Rom. 1:32).
- ✓ Taxes are used in wasteful ways that do not promote good and too often benefit the government officials and not the people of the country.

We see evil in the world and it is grievous and anger-provoking. And in America it is tempting to say, "I have a voice and I/we can fix this" — and it is tempting to put our hope in the political process and work and labor for political change and new political powers and new governmental authorities.

We do not know who will win any election on Tuesday night (or even if it will be known who will win on Tuesday night); but we do know what we will need to do on Wednesday morning and every morning following that morning. The Lord has given us comfort and commands to direct us — and those directions will give us comfort and peace regardless of the outcome of Tuesday. We do not need to be anxious or fearful because our job description does not change; nothing will be altered by Tuesday's results.

Can I give you a simple phrase to guide you this week? **Be steadfast.** Be immovable. Be abounding in the work of the Lord. That work for Christ is not vain or empty. **Be steadfast in your spiritual calling — in discipling.**

We could go to numerous places in the NT for help this morning, but I want us to return to a portion of Scripture that establishes the foundation of a healthy and faithful church ministry — **2 Timothy 2:1-8.**

This is Paul's letter to his most beloved disciple and the young pastor of the Ephesian church — Timothy. It is a personal letter to this pastor, and those who lead with him, but it is also to the church and how the church is to conduct itself as a church. It is his final letter and a final message of instruction. The letter is filled with imperatives, and in this section, Paul is emphasizing the health of the church, and how a church becomes and maintains health.

Paul's message to Timothy (and us) is to —

**BE STEADFAST IN YOUR WORK OF CARING FOR CHRIST'S PEOPLE.**

To continue in discipling steadfastness, **heed five imperatives** to care for God's people (this is not everything a church does, but these imperatives create a mindset and spiritual atmosphere of biblical care). We have been both graced with privilege and entrusted with responsibility in the church — we want to be wise in how we enjoy our privileges and faithful in how we carry out our responsibilities. These reminders are given to stimulate our faithful steadfastness to care for God's people — even in political change...

## 1. Guard the GOSPEL (1:13-18)

- What Paul will say is in the context of suffering (1:7-8, 12; 2:3ff; 3:1ff; 4:5ff). What do we do when suffering and afflicted? The answer is consistent throughout the letter and begins in 1:13 —
- Two IMPERATIVES
  - ✓ **retain the standard of sound words** (v. 13) = i.e., keep and hold on to healthy (**sound**) doctrines of the faith — doctrines that produce spiritual health. He is talking about personal godliness.
    - The obvious implication of this is that unhealthy beliefs produce unhealthy lives.
    - Note how this is to be retained — **in faith and love** — the attitude Timothy had in maintaining his faith was as important as the keeping of his faith.
  - ✓ **guard...the treasure** (v. 14) = protect the treasure of the gospel against loss, destruction, and change.
    - Guarding the gospel is *doctrinal* protection — *defending* its truthfulness.
    - Guarding the gospel is *personal* appropriation — *living* its truthfulness. Timothy not only validating the gospel with his arguments for it but also by the manner of his life (1 Tim. 4:16)
    - The way we guard godly doctrine is **by the Holy Spirit** — in submission to His will and work
    - The reason we are careful with the gospel is because it has been **entrusted** to us — as He is keeping and protecting us (v. 12), we keep and protect His gospel (1 Tim. 6:20; 3:15).
  - ✓ When suffering, our first impulse is often, “how do I get out of this and change this?” Paul’s admonition and first impulse is, “Am I upholding the gospel and living consistently with it?” Why?
- Two EXAMPLES (one warning and one encouragement)
  - ✓ **all in Asia...turned away...Phygelus and Hermogenes** (v. 15). They refused to stand for the gospel. **All** is probably hyperbole, but it was a very large number.
    - **you are aware** = their defection was obvious — it was well known and obvious
    - Their defection was typical — what they did was not unusual. Some who look like they will not, will still reject the gospel (e.g., Demas in 4:10; also 1 Jn. 2:19).
  - ✓ But there is a contrast: **Onesiphorus** (v. 16). He went “beyond the call of duty” to find Paul.
    - He eagerly and openly searched for Paul (in contrast to Phygelus...who did not identify w. him) The fundamental way He defended the gospel was simply openly associating with a defender!
    - He was unashamed of the gospel and its effects — even if he had to suffer. (Does **the Lord grant him mercy** mean he gave his life in his service of Paul and the church?)
- In our church culture, most of us are in danger of denying the power of the gospel and looking to other solutions beyond the gospel. We are prone to believing in “the gospel *and...*” rather than gospel.
- We are not called to protect political entities or civic customs or even to change the culture. The culture will not change (at least not the way we want — *it will get worse*; cf. 3:1, 13).

- We are called to protect, guard, live, and preach the gospel. And in preaching the gospel, some will be saved and some (individuals) will be changed. And that has always been our only goal.
- It is good to vote and voice our concerns and advocate for truth and defend the defenseless; and we are grateful for believers who serve Christ in their roles in government.
- But we also need to remember that our first calling is to the gospel and defending and living the truth of Christ (Mt. 28:18-20; 1 Tim. 3:15) and remember that when governments, rulers, and influencers are unrighteous, our only power is the authority of the gospel to change individual men's hearts.
- It is a reminder that the gospel is our hope — social action, political agendas, and psychological theories do not change men's hearts. Only the gospel can change people. Guard the gospel.

## 2. Be Strong in God's GRACE (2:1)

- **therefore** = because of commands in the previous vv., the following conclusion is made —
- **be strong**, which more lit., is "be strengthened" (like 4:17) — i.e., God is the One strengthening him
  - ✓ To say "be strengthened by God" did not mean that Timothy needed more of God but that he needed to continue to use more of God's infinite provision — to live in daily reliance on God.
  - ✓ This is another way of saying, "If I stand, I stand because of the empowering strength of Christ, not because of me..." There is no self-sufficiency; we are only self-insufficient.
  - ✓ To give this command also affirms that Timothy is (and we are) inherently weak and incapable. But there is grace and strength available to make us adequate (our strength is not our wisdom or plans).
  - ✓ Cf. 2 Cor. 11:30; 12:9-10; 13:3; Heb. 12:12-13.
- The source of Timothy's strength was the **grace** of Christ (**in Christ** is the same as 1:13 — there is a gracious strength that comes from fellowship with Christ — being in Him).
  - ✓ Christ's grace is manifested supremely in the gospel, salvation, and the provision of the Spirit (1:14).
  - ✓ "Timothy, your power for endurance comes from the grace and provision of God in the gospel."
  - ✓ Even the spiritual son of the apostle Paul needed the reminder that he was susceptible to forgetting dependence on God and grace. Even Timothy wasn't strong (cf. 1:6, 8)
  - ✓ God will use a variety of means and words to remind us of our dependence on His provision and that provision is not something we are "owed," but a gift that is all of grace. (Judg. 7:1ff).
  - ✓ When Paul says, "be strong..." he does not mean that there is nothing wrong in the world and that we should just "be happy." He means that however wrong things are, God's grace is sufficient. A puritan has said, "the brokenness of these times (wherein the [hearts] of most people are filled with alarm, and their mouths with murmurings)...[compel the reminder that] the seas are not as stormy as men's spirits are tempestuous." The times are hard — and God's grace is more than enough.
- This church — all its people and all its ministries — is not about man-made efforts and means, but about God's grace which has strengthened, equipped, and provided through the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:12f).

### 3. Entrust the Gospel to OTHERS (2:2)

- **Entrust** = to make a deposit, to entrust something for safekeeping. And what he is to entrust are **the things which you have heard** — i.e., the gospel (1:13). And he's also talking about *replication*.
- Here Paul lists four generations — and Paul could also have pointed to his being trained by Christ Himself — this chain is a reminder that the gospel is an unending chain that always goes to Christ.
- The exhortation: “Timothy, the treasure of the gospel has been given to you for your salvation and also for the purpose of giving it to others who will continue the process of giving it to others who are faithful. Keep building the house of God with the gospel. Only the gospel is strong to build the church.”
- Paul's reminder to Timothy is to find a **faithful** individual, train and equip him with gospel...
  - ✓ Timothy, *you* be faithful in following my example
  - ✓ *You* look for faithful people who will follow you
  - ✓ *You* use every opportunity to help them move closer to Christ and train them to be trainers.
- The times and seasons may change but the message has not changed and the personal responsibility of Timothy (and the church) don't change. We don't need a new message or method for a new age. The new era is just like the old era and it needs the “old” truth of the gospel. Only the gospel is adequate. E.g., Col. 1:28 —
  - ✓ Your message is Christ
  - ✓ Your audience is every believer
  - ✓ Your method is instruction
  - ✓ Your manner is with wisdom and discernment
  - ✓ Your goal is maturity
  - ✓ This is spiritual reproduction — having natural *and* spiritual children in Heaven
  - ✓ Someone has to follow behind us. How many “children” have been trained to continue...?
- We typically call this “discipleship,” but Paul is not talking about a program but about a relationship. You're thinking about someone else doing this; Paul is thinking about you. This is the responsibility of every believer — parents and pastors, Sunday School teachers and AWANA leaders, disciplers and counselors, home group leaders and lunch buddies. This is for all of us. This is for every season. This is what the world needs more than anything else.
- If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, this is what you need today.
  - ✓ The gospel is the truth that you were created for fellowship with God, through your sinful nature and sinful actions, you are condemned by God and rightfully could be sent this moment to Hell.
  - ✓ But in His incredible grace, God sent Christ to die on the cross, and poured out all His wrath on Christ, so that if you believe that Christ died in your place, God will count you as being righteous, even though you are not.

- ✓ This is the starting point for all of us and the greatest need for all of us — and the greatest need in the United States on election week, and on the Feni islands of PNG, and in war torn Ukraine and Lebanon and Israel and Russia, and...

#### 4. Suffer **HARDSHIP** (2:3-7)

- For most of us, it's hard to think about suffering/hardship — we naturally pull away from it. Yet...
- Listen to Paul's command to Timothy — **join us in suffering** — experiencing evil treatment.
  - ✓ Paul is suffering (in Roman prison and imminent martyrdom) and calls Timothy to join him.
  - ✓ Imagine that invitation card: "Next Friday: a gathering for suffering and martyrdom..."
  - ✓ What kind of people are interested in doing that? Soldiers. Athletes. Farmers.
    - A soldier didn't leave his post for **everyday** things, but would fight bravely, even to death.
    - An athlete didn't compromise his integrity but was faithful **to the rules** so he could **win**.
    - A farmer **works hard** — day and night, to the point of exhaustion, so he can eat.
    - All three persevere in their callings, working undistractedly and sacrificially (great personal cost).
- Likewise, every believer has one goal in mind — fulfill our calling/duty.
  - ✓ We do this because we are **soldiers of Christ** (v. 3). We remember the One we serve and we remember His goal for our lives. We are undistracted.
  - ✓ We do this because we want to **please the Lord** (v. 4). E.g., Mt. 25:21, 23; Phil. 3:10, 14.
- This is hard. It goes against the flesh. Even Timothy was fearful and timid — (1:8; 5:23)
  - ✓ Instead of being afraid of suffering we should be afraid of failing to please the Lord.
  - ✓ Instead of being afraid of evil treatment from others, we should be afraid of the suffering of unbelievers under the just wrath of God.

"Christians ought to be a kind of men born to bear slander, and injuries; open to malice and deceits, mockeries of wicked men. And not that only, but they ought to bear patiently all these evils. That is, they should have such complete spiritual composure that, having received one offense, they make ready for another, promising themselves throughout life nothing but the bearing of a perpetual cross." [Nichols, *A Time for Confidence*.]

- How are we going to communicate the gospel to those who don't believe? Sometimes, the voice will be heard most clearly while accompanied by suffering. (Your current hardship and your response to God may be the very means by which God is giving you gospel opportunities.)
- Hardship is not the worst thing that might happen to us; it is far worse that we might be unfaithful to Christ (and pursue wrong solutions) when things get hard.
- So how about this for a new gospel plan: "Come suffer with us! We offer hardship, ill-treatment, injustice, few friends, ostracism — and the strength of God and the fellowship of believers to sustain you when it seems impossible — even when we are a cultural minority (which we usually are).

## 5. Remember Christ (2:8)

- Why did Paul say this? Because it is always tempting to forget Christ and forget our purpose.
  - This admonition became especially fitting to a church that forgot Christ (Rev. 2:5; Eph. 1:10).
  - **Remember** the work of Christ, Paul reminded Timothy — i.e., the resurrection.
  - **Remember** the person and future of Christ — as **descendent of David**, His Messianic rule and kingship.
  - **Remember** the past, present, and future works of Christ. He was, is, and will be our only hope.
  - Remember Jesus Christ — He is the means and objective of everything we do. Don't forget Christ.
- When you watch election returns and make a house repair and invest your money and talk to your unbelieving neighbor, remember Christ. Everything is always about Christ and the gospel.

**CONCLUSION:** We don't know if it will be Wednesday or in January, or a decade from now. But hard days are coming for us. Pleasures and ease that we have enjoyed will be stripped away and suffering will come. That's not my opinion. That's God's promise (3:1ff; cf. Rom. 1:32). Difficult days will still come...including persecution and evil men. The world is changing and will continue to change and rebelliously move away from Christ. The world will increasingly hate and rebel against Christ. But not everything will change.

What will be the same tomorrow and Wednesday and next January and...?

- ✓ **God's grace** from Christ will still be adequate for every ministry need (2 Tim. 2:1)
- ✓ **The Spirit of God** will still keep and preserve us in the faith (Eph. 1:13-14)
- ✓ **The Lord will still strengthen** us to make proclamation of Him (2 Tim. 4:17)
- ✓ **Jesus Christ**, will still be the same yesterday, today and forever...the One who is resurrected and the descendent of David who will sit on David's throne (2 Tim. 2:8)
- ✓ **Jesus Christ will still come** and will still appear and still set up His eternal Kingdom (2 Tim. 4:1)
- ✓ **The Lord will still rescue** His people from every evil deed (2 Tim. 4:18a)
- ✓ **The Lord will still take** His people into His kingdom (2 Tim. 4:18b)
- ✓ **There will still be a crown** of righteousness for those who loved His appearing (2 Tim. 4:8)
- ✓ **The church** will still be God's appointed pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15)
- ✓ **All Scripture** will still be from God and still have His authority (2 Tim. 3:16)
- ✓ **All Scripture** will still be profitable, and for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness and make the man of God adequate (2 Tim. 3:16-17)
- ✓ **God will still be** the eternal King, immortal, invisible, the only god and worthy of all honor and glory (1 Tim. 1:17)
- ✓ **We will still have a calling** to entrust the Word given to us to other faithful men (2 Tim. 2:2)
- ✓ **SUMMARY:** The world is still broken (and will be until Christ returns), sin is still harmful, Satan and evil men are still against us, ministry work is still hard and we still have adequate grace and strength to persevere in that work (1 Tim. 2:5-6). Whatever happens this week, don't despair. But, **Be steadfast in your spiritual calling.** Be steadfast in caring for God's people.