

2 Timothy

I. Introduction

A. **2 Timothy 2:1-7** . . . You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. [2] The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. [3] Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. [4] No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. [5] Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. [6] The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. [7] Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

B. This portion of scripture is often used to exhort pastors and missionaries to do their work thoughtfully, prayerfully, diligently, boldly, and with perseverance.

1. Today, we are going to begin considering how the exhortations in these verses apply to us – everyday Christians who have a desire to live the Christian life more nearly as God intends, and who know we need God’s help to do so.

2. **Application overview:** **Vs 1** tells us where the power comes from for growth in godliness, spiritual maturity, Christian ministry, and Christian witness. **Vs 2** reminds us to pass on God’s truths we have learned and know in order to help others learn and grow. **Vs 3** calls us to willingly bear the cost of doing battle with our sinful self and serving others. **Vs 4** gives us a solid motive for remaining focused on what matters most. **Vs 5** tells us that to gain the outcome desired, we must pursue godliness according to God’s rules and methods. **Vs 6** reminds us that if we will diligently work at growing, loving, and serving, the good that comes from it will be our reward.

C. Prayer

II. The source and kind of strength needed for spiritual growth, Christian maturity, and loving service

A. [1] You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

1. Paul makes three more statements about where we get our strength and empowerment for godly living. They are found in:

- a. **Ephesians 6:10**, “...be strong in (*in union with*) the Lord and in (*with*) the strength of His might.”
 - b. **Philippians 4:13**, “I can do all things through (*in union with*) Him who strengthens (*empowers*) me.”
 - c. **Colossians 1:10-11**, “...walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; [11] strengthened (*made strong*) with all power, according to (*by means of*) His glorious might (*power*), for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience....”
 - d. The combined truth conveyed in **2 Timothy 2:1** and the three scriptures just read is that the enabling power for growth in godliness, spiritual maturity, Christian ministry, and Christian witness comes to us from God as we live in union with God.
2. This does not alter the fact that we are, by nature, capable of many things – both good and evil. We are capable because we possess a variety of abilities – from intellectual abilities to physical abilities to educated abilities to trained and practiced abilities. Even those who have some sort of handicap have abilities that enable them to live a reasonably full life within the limitations of their handicap.
 - a. In fact, it is our natural abilities that lead us to believe in education, read self-help literature, hire a music teacher, listen to a sports coach, and pursue any other kind of help from those more knowledgeable or skilled than us in order to continue improving and maturing.
 - b. Yet when it comes to removing the evil in our character and replacing it with good; when it comes to breaking free from long-held irrational fears and living sensibly and godly; when it comes to removing the self-centered, self-destructive, and relationship damaging parts of our personality and replacing them with qualities that enable us to love others as we want to be loved; when it comes to changing long-standing beliefs and values, and when it comes to putting to death self-rule and self-care and replacing those with trust in God’s goodness and submission to God’s rule, we need outside help.
 - c. The reality is, as good and powerful as our natural abilities are, they are not enough to bring about the kind of transformation required to go from a selfish, self-ruled sinner to a God-trusting, God-loving, people-loving, Christ-like Christian. This depth of transformation requires God’s empowerment and help.

- B. We get a practical picture of our need for help from the OT Israelites.
1. The Israelites were a very capable people, as individuals and as a nation. Even as slaves in Egypt, they showed themselves to be resilient, financially adept, and committed to their community good.
 2. Yet when it came to breaking free from slavery in Egypt, surviving forty years in the wilderness, and clearing the Promised Land of its walled cities, well-equipped armies, and giants, their natural abilities were not enough. They needed outside help – and the only one who could give the kind of help they needed is God.
 3. Interestingly, His help, for the most part, is invisible to the human eye. Yet Israel saw the results of His help in such things as their deliverance from Egypt, their adventure at the Red Sea, their survival in the wilderness, and their victories over those they had to drive out of the Promised Land in order to live there in a God-fearing, God-pleasing, God-blessed way.
 4. In other words, it was God’s empowerment and help coupled with their natural abilities that enabled the Israelites to walk out of Egypt, cross the Red Sea, survive the wilderness, defeat their foes, clear the Land, and continue living in it as people blessed by God.
- C. Our situation – though in many ways different – is very similar to theirs. Consider:
1. Our most formidable, ferocious, stubborn foe is ourselves – that is, the part of our selves that includes our old nature, our flesh, our pride, our ungodly thinking, our sinful or uncontrolled passions, our unfounded or irrational fears, our selfishness, our self-rule, our excuse making and blaming to avoid taking responsibility for things we have done, our stubbornness, our love of pleasure, our quest for comfort and ease, our dependence on money for security, our discontent and ingratitude, our propensity to gossip, our feelings of envy, jealousy, resentment, bitterness, anger, malice, and hatred, our need to feel important, accepted and respected, our lack of self-discipline, and our distrust of God.
 2. It is true that on our own we are able to tame, or modify, or even change parts of our selfish and sinful self. But we cannot defeat it and replace it – so as to be transformed into godly, humble, and loving people – without God’s empowerment and help.
 3. Now I understand that doing the hard work of putting off your old self and putting on Christ-likeness can feel exhausting, unending, and lonely – as if you are doing this all by yourself.

4. And in a way you are, because you are the one who has to get up each morning and prepare for battle. You have to put on your battle gear – such as a godly mindset, godly attitudes, godly values and beliefs, and essential truths from God’s word. You have to guard your thoughts, examine your intentions, consider your words, analyze your behavior, and measure it all by the word of God – which means you must know enough of God’s word and have it sufficiently implanted in your mind to do this kind of measuring in real-time. You have to persevere, in spite of feeling despair or a sense of hopelessness after failing again today like you did yesterday and the day before that. You have to humble yourself in the face of failure, admit you’ve done wrong, make things right, seek forgiveness, and bear the consequences of your sin. And you have to get up tomorrow and do it all over again.
5. Added to all this is the fact that just as Israel could only take on one walled city, one well-equipped army, and a few giants at a time, so you can only take on one or two character flaws, sins, passions, fears, and the like, at a time. This means it will take some years to work your way through all that you should not be in order to become as godly as you can and ought to be.
6. So yes, it is hard work. It is exhausting. It can feel unending. There will probably be times when you wonder if it’s worth the effort, especially when you are feeling like what you are working on is never going to change.
7. But it will, and you will **IF** you will persevere in depending on and making good use of God’s empowerment and ever-present help to battle your old self and put on Christ-likeness in its place.
8. Therefore, **2 Timothy 2:1** says, “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” And I am adding: use that strength to fight the good fight, to defeat your worst enemy (*self*), and to put on Christ-likeness in area after area until you are transformed and experiencing the abundant life Jesus came to make available to us.

D. The Bible describes a number of ways God empowers and helps us live the Christian life. Here are four of those ways.

1. **2 Peter 1:3-4** tells us that God, by His power, has provided us with everything we need to live a godly life – in spite of our human frailties, the devil’s temptations, and the sinfulness of our world. In addition, God has given us promises that – if we will rely on them – will enable us to partake of (*share in*) the divine nature.

2. **1 Corinthians 10:13** assures us that God will not allow us to be tempted with any temptation stronger than our current ability to resist and turn away from. Added to that, God provides a way to escape temptation's seductive and captivating allure. This means we no longer have to give in to temptation because it is never stronger than God's protection, and we always have a way out.
 3. **Philippians 1:6** confirms that God He will bring to completion His sanctifying work in us. Regardless of how sinful we have been or how troubled our past, we are not beyond God's power and ability to make us new creatures. In other words, God will continue helping and empowering us until we have become all that He saved us to be.
 4. **James 1:5-8** tells us that God gives us wisdom if we ask for it. This means we can have all the wisdom we request – with one condition. We must act on the wisdom given before God will give us more.
 - a. Here is the reason. If we ask God for wisdom and then doubt its sensibleness, we are doubting not only the wisdom given, but also the wisdom Giver.
 - b. In other words, to ask for wisdom and then disregard God's response tells God we will only make use of His wisdom if it meets with our approval. When this is our mindset, we are not asking for wisdom, we are looking for options in order to choose what seems best to us.
 - c. Therefore, when you ask God for wisdom, ask believing He knows more than you, and that the wisdom given is what you need. Then, use it. This is what asking in faith looks like.
- E. Knowing that God is our source for the power we need for growth in godliness, spiritual maturity, Christian ministry and witness is vital.
1. Knowing Bible stories and scripture verses that tell us about God's empowerment and help, and that encourage us to make good use of God's empowerment and help can be encouraging and motivational.
 2. Yet sadly, for too many of us, knowing isn't enough. It isn't enough because we are unwilling to treat the empowerment of God which we can't see as if it is as real as what we can see.
 3. Israel's story provides a classic example of knowledge not being enough. After spying out the Promised Land, they voted 10 to 2 against entering it. Driven by fear, they reasoned they were no match for the walled cities, well-equipped armies, and giants. They concluded that they would be defeated by what they could see rather than enabled by the unseen power of God to defeat them.

4. In addition, they gave greater weight to what they could see in the moment rather than what they had seen God do in the past.
5. In other words, they ignored God's powerful works from the past – such as delivering them at the Red Sea, bringing water out of a rock, feeding them with manna and quail, and making the sun stand still so they could win a battle.
6. Choosing not to trust in God's promised empowerment and help, they chose self-preservation – a decision that kept them out of the Promised Land and separated from the abundant life God had for them in that Land.
7. Are we not, at times, like those Israelites? Our distrust of God's provisions and promises may not be due to fear and our reliance on self-preservation, but it is due to something.
 - a. For example, it could be due to a form of laziness – leading to an unwillingness to do the hard work required or to persevere in doing the hard work for a prolonged period of time.
 - b. Or, it could be due to not wanting to lose out on some particular benefit of sin that we treasure.
 - c. We may even be deterred by thinking it is unfair that we have to change when others around us are not invested in changing.
 - d. Yet regardless of our reason, the outcome is the same as that of the Israelites – our unbelief, our lack of persistent effort, and our weak commitment to godliness is keeping us in the wilderness when we could be actively and progressively clearing the Land and experiencing the abundant life God has for us.

III. Conclusion

- A. We have the opportunity to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, a strength that is always present and available for our use, and always stronger than anything we have to face in this life.
- B. But to take hold of God's empowerment and help requires trust in God's goodness, a compelling desire for holiness of life, an intentional effort, and perseverance in doing the hard, seemingly relentless work of driving out what doesn't belong in us and putting in its place what God says does belong in us.
- C. May we choose godliness over unrighteousness. May we choose the abundant life over the wilderness. And may we take advantage of God's help and use God's strength to enter in, drive out what doesn't belong and put in what does.

IV. Communion

- A. Another of the ways God has made it possible for us to grow in godliness, spiritual maturity, and Christian ministry and witness is to purchase our salvation through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and to use the price paid to redeem us from the power, the practice, and the penalty of sin.
- B. As I pass out the bread and the cup, ponder this great gift of salvation along with the other ways God empowers and helps you come into the fullness of the abundant life He gives you in Christ Jesus. Then, we will commemorate and celebrate God's grace as we eat the bread and drink the cup together.