

Ii Timothy - Part 4 - Suffer for the Gospel

by John Stott

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being strong in the grace of Christ and suffering for the gospel, as exemplified by the experiences of Christ, Paul, and the Christian.

Duration: 51:56

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:1

Topics: "Suffering"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of serious Bible study and hard work in understanding scripture. He highlights the need for Christians to not simply skim through passages, but to engage in deep study and prayer to gain understanding. The speaker uses metaphors of a soldier, athlete, and farmer to illustrate the dedication and commitment required in spreading the good news and communicating biblical truth. He emphasizes the responsibility of Christian workers to accurately and clearly teach the truth, live righteous lives, and be gentle in their manner. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the need for a balanced combination of thought and prayer in understanding scripture.

Transcript

This is the second in a series of four Bible studies in Second Timothy, given by the Reverend John R. W. Stott at the Eighth University Missionary Convention, held in the Assembly Hall at the University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois, December 1967. Let's open our Bibles at the second letter of Paul to Timothy, chapter two. We entitle chapter one, The Charge to Guard or to Protect the Gospel, and we call chapter two, The Charge to Suffer for the Gospel, because although that is not the only theme of this chapter, it is a predominant theme.

Let me read you now the first two verses. You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And what you have heard from me before many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

There is a stirring exhortation with which the chapter begins, and let us look at it for a few moments. At the end of chapter one of Second Timothy, we were told that all Asia had turned away from Paul, except Onesiphorus and his household, who were a bright and outstanding exception. And it is in contrast to this multitude who had turned away from Paul and repudiated his authority, that the apostle says to Timothy, but now you, my son, are to be different.

First then, there is a call to be strong. Be strong. Timothy was weak, Timothy was timid, and yet he was called to a position of leadership in the church and in an area in which Paul's authority was rejected.

And it is as if Paul says to him, now listen, Timothy, never mind what other people say, never mind what other people think, never mind what other people do, you are to be strong. Never mind how shy you feel, never mind how weak you feel, you are to be strong. That's the first thing.

Second, you are to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. If the exhortation had simply been, be strong, it would have been absurd indeed. You might as well tell a snail to be quick, or a horse to fly, as tell a weak man to be strong, or a shy man to be brave.

Timothy is not to be strong in himself, he is not just to grit his teeth and to clench his fists and to set his jaw. No, he is, as the Greek literally means, to be strengthened with the grace that is in Christ Jesus. To find his resources for Christian service, not in his own nature, but in the grace of Jesus Christ.

It's an exhortation to be strong. Second, to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And thirdly, for the ministry to which he had been called.

Verse 2. I want to remind you what we saw yesterday, that Paul was in prison for the second time. He was awaiting trial and anticipating execution, to be sentenced to death. In that situation, it was essential for the Apostle Paul to make some arrangements for the preservation of the truth, and for its accurate transmission to succeeding generations.

And in verse 2, he envisages four stages in the transmission. The first is that he has himself received the truth as a deposit from God. The second is that he now entrusts the deposit to Timothy.

He has done so before many witnesses in his public teaching. Thirdly, Timothy is to entrust it to faithful men. Presumably meaning, in the first place, ministers of the Word, Christian elders, whose responsibility, like that of Jewish elders in the Old Testament, was to preserve the tradition.

And fourthly, they were to be the sort of men who would be competent, both because of their ability to teach, and because of their integrity and faithfulness, they would be competent to teach others also. Now let me say, with all the emphasis at my command, that this is the only kind of apostolic succession which the Apostles themselves envisaged. It was a succession of apostolic tradition.

It was a transmission of apostolic doctrine, handed down unchanged from the Apostles to the generations that followed, from God to Paul, from Paul to Timothy, from Timothy to faithful men, and from faithful men to others also, which includes ourselves. This was to be the succession, and the succession was a transmission, not of authority by the laying on of hands, but of the gospel, of the good deposit, of the apostolic faith of Scripture, passed down from the Apostles from generation to generation to generation, like the Olympic torch, from hand to hand. Now this, my friends, is our responsibility in this generation.

We have received the deposit. How? From Scripture. This is where the apostolic deposit is today.

It is in Scripture. And we receive it from Scripture, and we pass it on to other people. Now this is our fundamental task, and the Apostle Paul goes on to illustrate it in the rest of the chapter by a number of illuminating metaphors.

Three in the first part of the chapter, and three in the second part of the chapter. And each of these metaphors illustrates a different aspect of our responsibility in the transmission of biblical truth to our own generation, and the generation that follows us. Now the first three are favorites.

The first three metaphors, the soldier, the athlete, the farmer, we come across them in several parts of Scripture. Let's look at them one by one. First, the Christian worker is a dedicated soldier.

Verses three and four. And the good soldier is so called in this passage because his dedication includes a willingness to suffer, and a willingness to concentrate. First, a willingness to suffer.

Verse three, take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Soldiers on active service do not expect a safe or an easy time. They take hardship and risk and suffering as a matter of course.

These things are part and parcel of a soldier's calling. So too the Christian. If he is loyal in the transmission of the gospel, he must expect opposition, persecution, and ridicule.

But he is not only dedicated in his willingness to suffer, but also in his willingness to concentrate. Verse four, no soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to satisfy the one who enlisted him. He doesn't get entangled in business, as J.B. Phillips puts it.

On the contrary, he frees himself from civilian affairs in order to give himself to soldiering. And so, New English Bible, to be wholly at his commanding officer's disposal. I remember so often in World War II, people would frequently say to one another with a wry smile, there's a war on, which was a watchword amply sufficient to justify any austerity, or self-denial, or abstention from innocent activities which was necessary because of the current emergency.

So too the Christian. Now don't misunderstand this. The Christian is living in the world, and he cannot avoid his ordinary secular duties.

In the home, at his business, on the campus, in his academic work, and every Christian should be known for his hard work, and his good degrees on the campus, and in the wider community. The Bible leaves us in no doubt that the Christian is to be a good citizen. And in all these things, he has to be outstandingly conscientious.

But what is forbidden to the Christian soldier, the good soldier of Jesus Christ, is not all secular activities, but entanglements, which, although they may be perfectly innocent in themselves, distract him from fighting Christ's battles. And this should be especially true of the minister and the missionary, who is set apart for the transmission of the truth, and the communication of the truth. But in a secondary sense, it is true of every Christian, who, through careful thought and prayer, must decide where he draws the line between what is essential as his Christian duty in secular activities, and what is an entanglement which he must set aside.

Now then, every Christian worker is a soldier, even timid Timothy. Because whatever our temperament we cannot avoid the Christian conflict. And if we're to be a good soldier, we'll be a dedicated soldier, committing ourselves to a life of hardship, and suffering, and renouncing the entanglements of the world.

Next, the second metaphor is a law-abiding athlete. Paul turns from the Roman soldier to the competitor in the Greek games. Verse five, an athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

There is in no athletic contest is the competitor giving a random show of strength or skill. Every sport has its rules, and every event has its prize as well. Not in olden days a silver trophy, but an evergreen wreath that was placed upon the head of the successful competitor.

But no athlete, however brilliant, was ever crowned with this evergreen wreath, unless he had competed according to the rules. No rules, no wreath, was the order of the day. Now the Christian life is like a race, not in the sense that we're competing with one another, but here in the sense that we are to keep the rules.

We've got to run the Christian race to live the Christian life lawfully. The Greek word is *nomimos*, according to the law. I want to say a word here about the new morality, for the new moralists tell us that the category of law has been altogether abolished in the Christian life, and they are talking sheer unadulterated rubbish.

The Christian is under obligation to live *nomimos*, according to the law. He is to keep the rules. Oh, he is not under the law for salvation.

As a way of salvation, he's under grace, not under the law. But he's under the law as a guide to conduct. And there is no crown otherwise.

Not that our law-abiding works can ever justify us, but without them, without obedience to the law, we shall prove that we have never been justified. And the third metaphor is the hard-working farmer, verse 6. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. If an athlete must play fair, a farmer must work hard.

He toils at his work. Hard work is indispensable to good farming, especially in underdeveloped countries before mechanization arrives, when successful farming depends as much on sweat as on skill. However poor the soil, however inclement the weather, however disinclined the farmer, he simply cannot afford to be a sluggard.

He must keep at his work, and having put his hand to the plough, he must not look back. And the first share in the harvest will go to the hard-working farmer. He deserves it.

And only if he has worked hard and persevered in his work can he expect a good crop. And what's the application of that? Well, there are several possible ones. I want to tell you first that holiness is a harvest.

Holiness is a harvest. It's the fruit of the Spirit, because the Holy Spirit is the chief farmer. But we have our part to play, and we are told to sow to the Spirit, to be disciplined in prayer and in meditation in the Scripture and in attendance at other means of grace.

There are many Christians I meet who are surprised that they are not gaining the victory over temptation and that they are not growing in Christian holiness. And if somebody is here like that, I say to you, is it because you are a sluggard? Is it because you are not cultivating the field of your character? Why should you expect the fruit of holiness if you take no trouble in your Christian life? As Bishop Ryle in his great book on holiness says again and again, there are no gains without pains in the Christian life. It is the hardworking farmer who has the first share in the crop.

And if holiness is a harvest, the winning of souls is a harvest also. The harvest is plentiful, Jesus said. Yes, and of course it is God who chiefly gives the growth.

But again, we have no liberty to be idle. And both the sowing of the good seed of God's Word and the reaping of the harvest are hard work, especially when the labor is a few. How we need to learn in our generation that the winning of souls is hard work.

Souls are not won by the slick automatic application of a formula. Souls are won by tears and sweat and pain, especially in prayer and in sacrificial personal friendship. You want to win a harvest on the campus? Then it is the hardworking farmer who has the first share in the crop.

Soul winning is difficult. It's not easy. Here then are three qualities of the wholehearted Christian worker.

The Christian worker who seeks to transmit the gospel that he has received from Scripture and pass it on to others. The dedication of a good soldier, the law-abiding obedience of a good athlete, and the painstaking labor of a good farmer. And without these, we simply cannot expect results.

Now verse seven that concludes the paragraph. Think over what I say and the Lord will give you, the better manuscripts make it a promise rather than a prayer, the Lord will give you understanding in everything. Now I wish I had half an hour to preach to you on that verse.

It is a very important verse of Scripture and it combines two things which many evangelical Christians separate. Think over what I say and the Lord will give you understanding in all things. Now there are some Christians who never get down to any serious Bible study.

All they do is to skim through a passage of Scripture in a haphazard and a desultory way, like a butterfly flitting from flower to flower. They hope and pray that the Spirit may possibly show them what it means, but they do no hard work. Then there are other Christians who are very good at their study.

They are hard-working farmers as it were. They use their minds, they grapple with the text of Scripture, they compare the versions, they consult the commentaries, they pour over the concordances, but they forget that it is only the Lord ultimately who grants, notice it's a gift, who grants understanding in everything. So let's not divorce what God has joined together.

If you want to understand the Scripture, then a balanced combination of thought and prayer is essential, of giving our minds to the study of Scripture and of looking to the Lord to give us understanding. Consider what I say and the Lord will give you understanding in all things. Now that brings us to verses 8 to 13.

So far, if you have followed me carefully, I think you will agree that it has all been a variation upon one theme, and that is that nothing that is worthwhile is ever easy. No soldier, no athlete, no farmer expects results without labor and suffering. In other words, suffering is the condition of blessing.

And having illustrated this from the soldier, the farmer, and the athlete, Paul further enforces it, not now by metaphor, but from experience. A, the experience of Christ, B, the experience of the Apostle Paul himself, and C, the experience of every Christian believer. That's verses 8 to 13.

Let's look at it briefly. A, the experience of Christ. Verse 8, remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David, as preached in my gospel.

Now the main reason, perhaps why, or one reason, why Paul tells Timothy to remember Jesus Christ, is that Jesus Christ is the heart of the gospel. And in these little phrases, risen from the dead and descended from David, we really have the heart of the gospel. We have the divine human person and the saving work

of Christ.

That is, of the seed of David, tells us that Jesus was human, born of the seed of David. That risen from the dead tells us that he was designated the Son of God, with power by the resurrection from the dead. Descended from David, risen from the dead, speaks of his humanity and his divinity.

But it not only speaks of his person, it also speaks of his work. Risen from the dead tells me that he died for our sins and that he was raised from the dead to prove the efficacy of his sin-bearing sacrifice. Of the seed of David reminds us that he came to establish his kingdom as great David's greater son.

He was the king of David's line. He was the saviour who suffered and died and rose again, and the king who sits upon David's throne. But there is another reason why Timothy must remember Jesus Christ.

Not only because Christ, risen from the dead and of the seed of David, is the essence of the gospel, but because Christ's own experience illustrates the principle that death is the gateway to life and suffering is the road to glory. He who rose again is he who died, and he who is reigning in glory upon David's throne was born in lowliness as David's seed. Now Timothy, meditate on that, and when you get hold of that, you will realize that you are called to suffering.

You learn it from the experience of Christ, and if you're tempted to avoid pain and suffering in your ministry, Timothy, remember Jesus Christ and think again. Then we turn from the experience of Christ to the experience of Paul, verses 9 and 10. For this gospel I am suffering and wearing fetters like a common criminal, but the word of God is not fettered.

Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect in order that they may obtain the salvation that in Christ Jesus goes with eternal glory. Paul was suffering for the gospel. Paul was languishing in a Roman dungeon.

Paul was enduring the painful humiliation of wearing fetters or chains upon his hands and feet like a common criminal, but although he was chained, the word of God was not chained. Even in prison, at his first defense, he was able to preach the gospel, and he could still write letters expounding the gospel. Now this is the point I want us to try and notice very carefully.

The relation between Paul's sufferings and the effectiveness of the gospel was not just one of contrast. I am chained, the gospel is not. It was actually one of cause and effect.

Now look at this very carefully in verse 10. Therefore I endure suffering for the sake of the elect in order that they may obtain salvation, so that in some sense the elect obtain salvation, Paul says, through my sufferings. Now this seems to be an amazing truth, that in some sense the salvation of men and women in the world today may be secured by our sufferings.

Oh, not of course that our sufferings have any redemptive efficacy like the sin-bearing suffering and death of Christ. No, no, but that the elect are saved through the gospel, and therefore we must preach the gospel, and if we preach the gospel we must suffer for the gospel. And any man or woman who is faithful in preaching the gospel will suffer for the gospel, and through that suffering will bring salvation in the providence of God to the elect.

There is profound truth there on which to meditate. The experience of Christ, the experience of Paul, and see common Christian experience. This is described in verses 11 to 13 by quotation from some common

proverb, some logos as Paul calls it, some Christian hymn maybe, which he declares to be reliable.

The saying is sure, and this saying consists of two pairs of epigrams. The first pair is about those who remain true and endure. The second pair is about those who become false and faithless.

In the first pair we see that the Christian life is a life of dying and enduring. It is dying with Christ. The thought here is not a death to sin of which Romans 6 speaks, but a death to self and a death to safety, and every Christian is called to die to himself as he takes up the cross and follows Christ.

But it's only if we die with him that we shall live with him, and it's only if we suffer with him and endure that we shall reign with him. The path to life is death. The path to reigning and glory is suffering.

It's true of every Christian. The second pair of epigrams concerns the dreadful possibility of our denying Jesus Christ and proving faithless. At the end of verse 12, if we deny him, he will deny us.

He said so. It's in the Gospels. If we deny him, he will deny us.

And if we are faithless, he remains faithful. Now probably in the context that means not that he's faithful to his promises, although he is, but he is also faithful to his threats. And when he gives this terrible threat that if you deny me, I will deny you, he is faithful to his threat.

Why? Well, because he cannot deny himself. And if he was not faithful to what he has said, then he would deny himself. But rather than deny himself, he will deny us if we deny him.

Again, there is a great deal to think about there that we haven't time to stay on. Now let us conclude this first part of the chapter and see if we can learn the main theme that is here expanded. From secular analogy, soldiers, farmers, and athletes, and from spiritual experience, Christ's, Paul's, and every believer's, we have learned one main lesson only, and that is blessing comes through pain, fruit through toil, life through death, glory through suffering.

In other words, never let us expect the Christian life and Christian service to be easy. Why should we? The Bible gives us no such expectation, rather the reverse. The Bible says again and again, no cross, no crown, no rules, no wreath, no pains, no gains.

It is this principle that took Christ through lowly birth and even lowlier death to his glorious resurrection and reign. It is this principle that brought Paul his chains, his fetters, and his prison cell in order that he might obtain salvation for the elect. It is this principle that makes every soldier willing to endure hardship, the athlete discipline, and the farmer toil.

I say again, never expect your Christian service to cost you nothing. Christian service is a costly thing, and that is why Paul began the chapter, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Now then we come to the second part of the chapter in which we're given three more metaphors.

In verse 15, the Christian worker is called a workman who has no need to be ashamed. In verse 21, he is a vessel for noble use, and in verse 24, he is the Lord's servant. So the active Christian is the Lord's workman, the Lord's vessel, and the Lord's servant.

And what is the characteristic that is expected of each? First, the unashamed workman, verses 14 to 19. Now let's look straight at verse 15. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, who is rightly handling the word of truth.

Now it's quite clear from this that the kind of work that the Christian workman does is teaching. It has to do with the word of truth. It is also clear that there are two kinds of workmen, one who is approved, tested, and tried, and who passes the test, and one who is not approved.

One who has no reason to be ashamed, and one who has every reason to be ashamed. And it is also clear that the difference between these two kinds of workmen, approved, not approved, ashamed, not ashamed, has to do with their handling or their treatment of the word of truth. And Paul puts these two workmen in contrast to one another.

Timothy is to be a good workman, approved and not ashamed. But in verse 17, we read of Hymenaeus and Philetus, on the other hand, who were false teachers, bad workmen, forfeiting God's approval, and have every reason to be ashamed. Now please follow me carefully.

The work of these workmen, in relation to the truth, Timothy the good workman, Hymenaeus and Philetus the bad workmen, is summed up in pregnant verbs. In verse 15, the good workman cuts straight the word of truth. I'll talk about that in a moment.

But that's what the Greek word means. He cuts it straight. But in verse 18, the bad workman swerves from the truth.

He deviates from it. And these two possibilities are set in contrast. Let's look at the good workman.

Now the Greek verb in verse 15 is *orthotomio*, and it means literally, not to divide rightly, as in the authorized version, but to cut straight. It only comes three times in biblical Greek here, and twice in the book of Proverbs. In Proverbs 3.6, we're told that God will make straight our paths, cutting them straight.

So you see, the word of truth, which is the scripture, is pictured as a road, or a path. And this road and path is to be cut straight. Straight as a freeway that goes right across the countryside.

The Aunt Gingrich Greek lexicon says that it is to cut a path in a straight direction. Or to cut a road across the country. A country that is forested, or otherwise difficult to pass through.

To cut it in a straight direction, so that the traveler may go directly to his destination. Or possibly the matter that is taken, not from road building, but from plowing. So that the New English Bible translates it, driving a straight furrow in your proclamation of the truth.

Now what does that mean? I suggest to you it can only mean one thing. The word of truth is the scripture. The apostolic faith of the New Testament.

And to cut it straight, or to make it like a straight path, is to be accurate on the one hand, and plain and simple on the other, in our exposition. The good workman is true to scripture, he does not falsify it. And he handles it with such care, that he stays on the path himself, keeping to the highway, avoiding the byways, and he makes it easy for people to follow.

Now that is the good workman. Cutting it straight, expounding it accurately, making it simple for the people to follow, and to understand. The second metaphor describes the bad workman, and it's a metaphor taken, not from civil engineering, but from the sport of archery.

Verse 18, here the truth is likened, not to a road that is being built, or to a furrow that is being ploughed, but to a target. The Greek word *stokos*, a target that is being shot at. And the Greek verb *astokio*, means

to miss the target.

You're shooting at the target, but you swerve from it, and you miss it altogether. Now, are we clear, that there are two alternatives set before us, in our handling of the word of truth. Every Christian teacher, as he shoots at the truth, can either hit it, or miss it.

And as he cuts the road, he can either make it straight, or he can make it tortuous, and crooked. And as a result, other people are affected, for better or for worse. If we cut the road straight, it will be easy for other people to keep on the road, and to follow us.

If, as we shoot at the target, we miss the mark, then the attention of other people is distracted from the target, watching the arrow as it goes astray. Now, of this danger, the Apostle Paul warns Timothy, I cannot, I haven't got time to go in to the details of what these false teachers were teaching. They were denying the resurrection.

Paul refers to their word battles, their godless chatter. He says that their teaching spreads like gangrene, and it's very dangerous. Whereas, they upset the faith of their followers.

He goes on in verse 19, God's firm foundation, that is the true church, stands sure, and it has a double seal. The Lord knows those who are His. That's the secret seal, and the visible one is let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from evil.

Now, this reference to the need to depart from evil brings us to the second metaphor, which is the clean vessel. Verses 20 to 22. The picture here is quite clear.

In every house of every kind, there are vessels or utensils, and in a great house, these are many and varied. There are gold and silver vessels for noble use, for the personal service of the master of the house, and there are wood and earthenware vessels for menial use in the scullery. So, in God's house, the church, there are true members, and there are counterfeit members.

And it's only the true members who prove their reality by their purity, who are fit for the master's use. And my brother and sister, is that not your greatest desire, as I think humbly I may say it is my greatest desire, to be a vessel fit for noble use, ready for any good work, consecrated and useful to the Lord Jesus, the master of the house? And can there be any greater privilege in the whole world as to be a vessel in the hand of Jesus? Yes, but there is a condition, and the essential condition is if anyone purifies himself from what is ignoble. Now, the authorised version is from these, and that is an exact translation of the Greek phrase, and these must mean vessels for ignoble use.

But we must be cautious in our interpretation. I know, as well as you do, that this verse is a proof text used by some to justify separating from all those in the visible church with whom they don't agree. And I tell you that the context in which the verse comes suggests a very different application.

For the verses are introduced by, let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from evil. And the paragraph continues, shun what is evil, youthful passions, and follow after righteousness. In other words, Timothy is to purify himself, not of all contact with evil men, but of all evil in himself, and only of evil associations insofar as they exercise a corrupting influence upon him.

In a word, it is moral rather than doctrinal purity that is in view here. So the essential condition of usefulness is to be clean. And Paul goes on to enlarge on what he means.

Verse 22 and 23, there are positive and negative counterparts. Verse 22, shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness. Now let me spend just a moment or two on those two verbs.

Shun is the Greek word *fugo*, and it literally means to seek safety in flight or to escape from danger. It is used literally in the New Testament of flight from physical danger. Moses is described as fleeing from Pharaoh into the Midian desert.

The holy family fled from Herod's wrath into Egypt. The harling sees the wolf coming and flees from the ravages of the wolf. The apostles in Gethsemane, after the arrest of Jesus, forsook him and fled.

And the Judean Christians in A.D. 70, when Jerusalem would be surrounded by Roman legions, were to flee to the mountains. And it is this verb that is used for fleeing from spiritual danger. Every man is told in Scripture to flee from the wrath to come.

That is the same Greek word. And here the Christian is to flee from idolatry, to flee from immorality, to flee from the spirit of materialism and the love of money, and in this verse to flee all youthful passions, which is not any sexual lust, but sinful ambition and the spirit of materialism and other things that afflict the youth of the world today. We are to flee.

That is, we are to recognize sin as something dangerous to the soul. We are not to negotiate with it. We're not to come to terms with it.

We're not to dilly-dally with it or to linger in its presence. We are to get as far away from it as possible, as quickly as possible. And like Joseph, when Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce him, we are to take to our heels and run.

Do you do that with temptation? If you want to be a vessel unto honor fit for the Master's use, it is necessary to flee from everything that is sinful and then to follow after everything that is good. And this to follow after, again, is a very strong word. It's used to pursue or to chase an enemy in war or a quarry in hunting.

And the Scripture tells us this again and again, that we're to run away from spiritual danger and to run after spiritual good, to flee from the one in order to escape it and to pursue the other in order to attain it. This is the consistent reiterated teaching of Scripture, to deny ourselves and to follow Christ, to put off what belongs to the old man and put on what belongs to the new, to mortify the members, our members on earth and to seek and to set our minds upon the things that are above, to crucify the flesh, to walk in the Spirit. If only we could learn this.

There's no other way to become holy, no other way to be a fit vessel for noble use when the Master can use us. And what a promise it is that if any man, if any man or woman in this convention will purify himself from these sins, he or she shall be a vessel unto honour. It is a definite promise, let us claim it.

Now for my last few moments, the third metaphor is the Lord's servant. Verses 23 to 26. The vessel in the house becomes a slave in the household.

In verse 23, Paul reverts again to these worded debates, this godless chatter, these stupid and senseless controversies of the false teachers. And in contrast to that, he says in verse 24, the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, forbearing and correcting his opponents with gentleness. And this is the demeanour fitting in the Lord's servant.

Jesus of Nazareth, the Lord's servant par excellence, described himself as gentle, same word, and lowly in heart. And so the Lord's servants today must also be kindly, forbearing, tolerant in spirit, not of error and evil, but in spirit and gentle. And then he will be a fit vessel in the Master's hand if he adorns his Christian teaching with a Christian character and demeanour.

And then verse 25 at the end, if he's gentle in correcting his opponents, it may be that God will grant them repentance, and that they may come to know the knowledge of the truth. Verse 26 said that they may escape from the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will. So I conclude.

This is a clarion call, this whole chapter, to Christian workers, spreading the good news, receiving the truth from Scripture, and communicating it to others. We are to be good soldiers, athletes, and farmers, dedicated in our work. We are to be unashamed workmen, accurate and clear in our exposition.

We are to be vessels for noble use, righteous in our character and conduct. And we are to be the Lord's servants, gentle in our manner. Or, if you like alliterations, we are to be committed in our labouring, clear in our teaching, clean in our living, and courteous in our speaking.

And only so can we be of use. Only if we give ourselves without reserve to soldiering, farming, and running can we expect results. Only if we cut the truth straight and do not swerve from it shall we be approved unto God and have no need to be ashamed.

Only if we purify ourselves from what is ignoble shall we be vessels for noble use and fit for the master's service. And only if we are gentle and not quarrelsome will God grant to our opponents repentance and the knowledge of the truth. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, again and again your word finds us out, humbles us, and rebukes us. And we grieve that we fall so far short of the sublime standards that you have set us. Enable every single member of our convention to seek to live according to scripture and to obey these divine commands, that in your goodness we may become vessels unto honour fit for you to use.

For your great name's sake. Amen.

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