

Paul's second letter to Timothy, which is also his last and final communiqué, is full of counsel to a young pastor. Paul started by reminding him of his spiritual heritage, then urged him to "fan into flame" God's gift to Him, and not to be ashamed of God's message of salvation, for God did not give us a spirit of fear, but of power, love and self-control (being "meek"¹).

This spirit of power, love and self-control is the source of strength we need to teach others the message of God's salvation: death is no longer the final frontier because Jesus Christ has burst through death, opening the gateway to life: *Jesus Christ who **abolished** death (1:10)*, and the start of our reading today, *Remember Jesus Christ (**is**) risen from the dead (2:8)*. This **is** the entire, complete Christian message: death separates us from God, and Jesus put an end to, eliminated, destroyed, invalidated death, opening the gateway to eternal life with God. The Christian message is to **believe** in Christ, who accomplished this: breaking the grasp of death, and opening the door to **restore** eternal life with God.

Perhaps because the message is so simple, and we are always looking for something a bit more involved and complicated to make worthwhile, the effort to believe, that people reject this message.

Our passage in 2 Timothy, is very appropriate to our circumstance today. In any election or referendum, those whose candidates win are happy, and those whose candidates did not win, are not. Some regret their vote, others are happy they voted the way they did. A good leader recognises this tension; after an event which divides families, communities and nation, a good leader's first task is to bring peace, to usher in calm, to

¹ see third Beatitude in Matthew 5

If we turn our backs on him, He'll turn his back on us;
If we give up on him, He does not give up,
for there's no way he can be false to himself.

*i.e. "I am comforted by this truth, that when we suffer and die for Christ it only means that we will begin living with him in heaven. And if we think that our present service for him is hard, just remember that some day we are going to sit with him and rule with him. But if we give up when we suffer, and turn against Christ, then he must turn against us. Even when we are too weak to have any faith left, he remains faithful to us and will help us, for he cannot disown us who are part of himself, and he will always carry out his promises to us."*²

The hymn reminds Timothy and us, of God's principle of free-will and freedom of choice.

- If we **choose** to suffer, and perhaps even die for Christ, God in Heaven is not blind to it; He is waiting with open arms to welcome us.
- If the burden of our work is too daunting and is disheartening, but we **choose** to continue, remember, we shall soon enjoy the riches of Christ's Kingdom.
- **BUT**, if we **choose** to give up when the going gets rough, **AND** turn our back on Christ and turn against Him, then He does the same. We have chosen not to be a part of Christ and His work, and He will not force Himself on us.
- Finally, should we find ourselves too weak to have any faith left, because life, the work we do, make such demands on us that we

² 2 Timothy 2:11-13 (Living Bible)

cannot see God, not His goodness and His love, God does not give up on us; He remains faithful, because we are a part of Him, and He cannot turn away from Himself.

Talk of encouragement! Remind yourself, unless you choose to turn away from God, unless you choose to turn against Christ who is only accomplishing God's heartfelt desire of reconciliation with us, God offers you Himself, His strength, His wisdom, and the riches of His Kingdom, to enjoy with Him

Paul now shifts from reminding Timothy, to reminding the congregation whom Timothy serves.

False teachers, those who misinterpret and misuse God's Word, have a habit of quarrelling over words, which ultimately only messes up the lives of those hearing God's Word. *Irreverent babble*, talk which does not glorify God says Paul, *naturally leads people into ungodliness, and this kind of talk spreads like gangrene!*

Paul encourages Timothy to teach God's word consistent with God's intended meaning and purpose. The word translates as "handling accurately", but literally means, "cutting straight", as a tent-maker must cut and sew absolutely straight for the tent to stand properly (Paul was a tentmaker), and a builder who uses a plumb line to make sure the wall is perfectly strait. Paul chooses these words to describe professions which stresses the laborious and painstaking nature of good workmen who attend to every detail.

What relevance does Paul's teaching have for us today?

First, proclaiming God's truth (Word), both in the church and in the world, keeps the church on secure footing and society on an even moral keel. The Word of God is our most important resource. The church must find ways to "**preach**" the Word!

Second, it is responsibility of the church (members) to **know** the Word of God. God has entrusted His word to His people who are the Church. As custodians of God's Word, we are responsible not only to keep it safe and defend it from physical damage, but we are also expected to safeguard God's word in our hearts and minds and defend it from being mutilated by those who either don't know it, or who choose to use it to promote their own agenda (false teachers).

Third, it is the responsibility of the keeper of God's Word, to faithfully **proclaim** it (inform) to those who do not know it. I have used the analogy before of those of us who discover a new restaurant or pub, and share the news of it with others; the Word of God is surely more valuable information about life, and death, and life eternal! We have an obligation to do this³.

Once again, this section of Paul's letter ends with encouragement. *The Lord knows those who are His. Let everyone who identify themselves with His name, calling themselves Christians, followers of Christ, stop doing things which hurt Him and the Father.*

We call ourselves Christian, we are stamped (hot-branded) with Christ's identity. He has trusted us with God's word and we are responsible to know it and proclaim. May God enable us with His strength and Wisdom to do this! **AMEN.**

³ 1 Corinthians 9:16