

TO MY SON

An Expositional Study of II Timothy

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CHAPTER FIVE -

SOME THINGS EVERY CHRISTIAN SHOULD UNDERSTAND

II Timothy 2:1-7

- 1 **Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.**
- 2 **And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.**
- 3 **Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.**
- 4 **No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.**
- 5 **And if a man also strive for Masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.**
- 6 **The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits.**
- 7 **Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.**

IN the closing verse of our passage there are two things of fundamental importance.

The first is in that word "**consider**". One of the troubles nowadays is that, in the rush and hurry of life, we are largely losing the capacity to think, because we will not make time to do it. Even we Christians are, by the pressure of things, so curtailing our private meditations, and, by reason of the prevailing fashion of short snippety sermons, so starved of spiritual provender, that we rarely "**consider**" even GOD's things. The word of Job 37:14, "**Stand still, and consider . . .**", is essentially a word for to-day.

Then, that other word, "**understanding**": The ordinary natural man does not, and cannot, grasp GOD's things, "**because they are spiritually discerned**", I Corinthians 2:14; but we who are spiritual should seek by the Spirit to attain to spiritual discernment - not only to observe His "**acts**", but to recognise His "**ways**", Psalm 103:7 - that is, to understand. Well, verses 2-6 of our present portion contain matters which we believers certainly ought to comprehend: for instance

THE STRATEGIC NATURE OF THE CHRISTIAN POSITION

If you are a Christian you are, in your measure, and in your circumstances, responsible for propagating the truth, and for passing on the life. See here (a) The links in the chain. The truth is (i) given to Paul; then, through him (ii) given to Timothy; then, through him (iii) given to "**faithful men**"; then, through them (iv) given to "**others also**". Every soul won is a new centre

of influence. You see that strikingly working itself out in the case of Andrew and the rest, in John 1.

Here is another striking instance. Richard Sibbes, an old Puritan, wrote a little book called *The Bruised Reed*. One day it fell into the hands of a tin peddler who gave it to a boy called Richard Baxter, who, through reading it, became in time the saintly Richard Baxter of Kidderminster. In process of time Baxter wrote *A Call to the Unconverted*, and by doing so kindled the flame in the heart of Philip Doddridge, who in turn wrote a book called *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*. This fell into the hands of William Wilberforce, changed his life, and led the great emancipator of the slaves to write *A Practical View of Christianity*.

By reading this the heart of Leigh Richmond underwent a strange blossoming, and, as one result, he wrote *The Dairyman's Daughter*, which besides being the most powerful religious influence in the life of Queen Victoria, had a good deal to do with the transformation of Thomas Chalmers, who in his turn touched the whole world.

Precious chain! Every Christian thus occupies a strategic position; in modern phrase, he is a "cell," a new centre of influence.

Look for a moment at (b) The time of Timothy's getting it. In the presence of "**many witnesses**" gives us a probable clue. Evidently it was at the time of his ordination, his setting apart, "**by the putting on of my hands**," 1:6; but it was not only Paul's hands, "**the laying on of the hands of the presbytery**" (I Timothy 4:14), is also recorded.

It looks as if, at that solemn service, there was included a public reading, and a public conveyance to Timothy, of that Summary of Christian Doctrine which Paul has called "**the form of sound words**". It was for the dissemination of this body of Truth that Timothy was that day set apart - in the presence of "**many witnesses**", those presbyters, and others.

And if the young bishop should ever waver, there were plenty of such witnesses to remind him of the solemn occasion, and of the solemn trust that was there and then committed to him.

So (c) The responsibility of passing it on - was once again pressed upon him.

(i) "**The same commit thou . . .**" - we have already had the word, in 1:12 and 1:14: we commit the deposit of ourselves to GOD; He commits the deposit of truth to us; and now we are, as Timothy, to commit that same deposit to others.

(ii) "**To faithful men**" - those whose integrity and fidelity is to be relied upon, who will not swerve aside, from any fear or favour, and who have this further gift, that they are

(iii) "**Able to teach others**" - so is the church advanced, and instructed, and organised; such is the machinery for safeguarding the purity of doctrine. But this responsibility rests, not only upon the leaders, but also on the rank and file.

When I was very young, a few of us got together and founded a new society - as if there were not quite enough already - and we called it "*The P.I.O. League*": we leagued ourselves together to

"Pass It On." In spite of our many and patent faults, we did understand that every Christian was expected to "pass on" the News. It was a funny name, but a fine idea. Thus, through human agency, was the Way and the Truth and the Life to be disseminated abroad.

You know the old legend of the archangel's talk with the Master after His ascension back to Glory. Michael, or Gabriel, had heard from His lips the story of what had happened down here - how He lived and died, and rose. "And how are the people of the world to get to know about it?," came the question; and the reply. "Well, I have a little company of friends there whom I have asked to publish it." "But what if, for any reason, they let you down, and fail to do it?" To which the Master answered, "I have no other plan."

Man is GOD's method: He looks to us to broadcast the News unsullied, to publish the Truth unimpaired. As a matter of fact, how have we been getting on with it? A missionary was talking one day with an enquiring heathen. He told him of the wonderful Dying, and the wonderful Rising. "And when did all this happen?" was the question. "Oh, about nineteen hundred years ago." "What," answered the pagan, "and why haven't you come to tell us before?"

Yes, why not, when the commission was so urgent, when the plan was so clear, when the responsibility was so heavy?

All this places the Christian in a position of real strategic importance; but have we grasped that, have we properly understood it? That lighthouse, set up there to send out the light to approaching ships - what a position of responsibility it holds. That wireless transmitter, made to send out its messages throughout the world, wherever it can find a receiver - for good or for ill - what a big responsibility it bears. When the Master says "**Ye are the light of the world**" (Matthew 5:14) and "**Ye also shall bear witness**" (John 15:27), we see again the strategic nature of our position in the world: but do we see it? Do we understand it?

Here is another thing:

THE STRENUOUS NATURE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

It is perfectly obvious, from a study of the New Testament, that Christianity was never intended to be an easy-going, sit-at-home, arm-chair religion, but a thoroughly vigorous affair. It has, of course, its quiet, contemplative side. Did not the amazingly energetic Paul advise us to "**study to be quiet**," in I Thessalonians 4:11? But this is only for our better equipment for the fray. The "**Hide thyself**" of 1 Kings 17:3 is to prepare the way for the "**Shew thyself**" of 18:1.

The "**Stand still**" of Exodus 14:13 is the preliminary of the "**Go forward**" of verse 15. The "**Wait**" of Acts 1:4 is with a view to the "**[Witness]**" of verse 8.

Let us treasure our Quiet Time with GOD, let us guard it against any interruption, let us use it to the very utmost - spending the precious unhurried period, Reading from His Word, Listening for His Voice, Speaking into His Ear; then let us get up, and get out, and get on. For the Christian life is a strenuous business; unless the Scriptures give us a false impression.

Look at the figures of it that Paul here gives.

We begin with (a) The Soldier - "**that warreth**".

A soldier has his times of rest, of sleep, of ease; but the whole purpose of his existence is a vigorous one. The word here is not that of a soldier on parade, or on guard, or on furlough, but on active service. There is a war on, and the man's whole life is keyed up, galvanised into action. That is our apostle's conception of the Christian life; that is one of the things he wants Timothy to grasp, one of the things that we, too, should grasp.

And, if we may borrow words used in a different connection, "**there is no discharge in that war**," Ecclesiastes 8:8. We can look for no demobilisation: so long as we remain here, we are on active service, with all the strenuous implications of the picture.

Next comes (b) The Athlete - "**strive for Masteries**". It does not seem quite certain whether Paul here has the wrestler or the runner in mind; but, in either case, what an energetic figure it is. Look at the man's strained muscles, look at his tense face: he's all out! His whole being is thrown into the business of that encounter; as should ours be, who "**wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places**," Ephesians 6:12; who are to "**run with patience the race that is set before us**," Hebrews 12:1.

And, by the by, that phrase "**with patience**" reminds us that our Christian race is no mere sprint - just a great brief spurt, and then all over! Some of us could make a big success of it, if it were like that; but it is the continuing that is our undoing - to keep on keeping on. Like so many of us, "Daniel purposed"; but, unlike many, "**Daniel continued**," Daniel 1:8, 21.

The "hundred yards," yes, we could manage that - perhaps even in "even time": ten seconds of concentrated, almost savage, vigour. The quartermile, or longer - that is a quite different proposition; that demands stickability as well as strenuousness. That is our present race: not a sprint, but a long-distance.

Then (c) The Farmer - "**that laboureth**". Some poor innocents imagine that a farmer's life is a nice easy-going existence - with plenty of eggs, and pork, and honey, and fresh air, and everything that's nice. Well, consult a Land Army girl and see what report she would give! The truth is so very different.

- (i) Constant toil - ploughing, conditioning, sowing, tending, reaping; always hard at it.
- (ii) Early hours - the farmer cannot afford to lose the first fresh hours of the day, any more than the Christian can dispense with that early morning time with GOD.
- (iii) Frequent disappointment - frosts, and pests, and weeds damaging the young growth.
- (iv) Infinite patience - for you can't rear a crop, or reap a harvest, in a week: like the athlete, and the soldier, the farmer has to keep on, and on, and on.
- (v) Perpetual humdrum - there is little excitement about his job, unless something goes wrong.

There is a certain thrill for the serving soldier, and for the all-out runner, but there is no thrill for the busy farmer. Such, then, is something of the condition of his life. No wonder that Paul characterises him as "**the husbandman that laboreth**": Dr. Handley Moule translates it, "the hardworking farmer".

There is no doubt, is there, that in Paul's view the Christian life is a strenuous matter. But have we grasped that? There seems to have been some danger - perhaps on account of his delicate health - of Timothy shrinking from this aspect of things and, like the faithful father that he was, Paul would rouse him to a proper understanding of the facts of the case. The state of the world, and the heart of the Master, combine to call for more "**labourers**," Matthew 9:38. At this "**eleventh hour**" on the clock of this Day of Grace, the Master has to challenge some of us, "**Why stand ye here all the day idle?**" Matthew 20:6. He wants Workers - not Shirkers. And next,

THE SACRIFICIAL NATURE OF THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

It was the Master Himself Who said (Luke 9:23), "**If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself . . .**" - say "No" to his self, turn his back on his self, cross his self out. And as we go through our present passage again, we see how completely the apostle has absorbed his Lord's teaching; for if Paul's implied injunctions are carried out, then Timothy's self must go - and our self, too!

It is clear that (a) There are things to be put up with - "**endure hardness**". Remember that for Paul's soldier it is not peacetime; there is a war on. He will have to bear the hardness of rough fare, and battle conditions, and perhaps cruel wounds.

(i) *He need not be surprised at this.* Old Chrysostom said, "It behooves thee not to complain, if thou endurest hardness; but to complain, if thou dost not endure hardness." If the Christian soldier has an altogether easy time of it, he may begin to wonder whether there is anything wrong - whether he is as active as he should be, or so definite, or so loyal. If we are really "out-and-out", we shall almost certainly have to put up with some form of hardness - perhaps from the lack of sympathy in our own family, perhaps from the ridicule and opposition of our world. We must face the fact that, while you can be a soldier without hardness, you can't be a "**good**" soldier without being quite ready to endure it.

(ii) *He will not be alone in this.* Our two words are one in the Greek, - quite literally it is "*endure hardness with,*" which Handley Moule renders "Take thy share in suffering hardness," and which Moffatt gives as, "Join the ranks of those who bear suffering."

Paul's immediate thought for Timothy is that the young man, if he suffered, would do so in company with himself:

"Timothy should suffer imprisonment - as, from Hebrews 13:23, we know he did - well, so had Paul. There is a certain mystic quality about this companionship in suffering which takes some of the sting out of hardness. That is something of what was in Peter's mind when he urged sufferers to steadfastness by the thought of their "**knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world**", I Peter 5:9.

More wonderful still is Paul's expression of desire "**that I may know Him. . . and the fellowship of His sufferings**", Philippians 3:10.

Moreover (b) There are things to be avoided - "**the affairs of this life**": that is, of ordinary civilian life. Dr. Alexander Maclaren has written, "In Paul's time there were no standing armies, but men were summoned from their ordinary avocations and sent into the field. When the hasty call came forth, the plough was left in the furrow, and the web in the loom; the bridegroom hurried from his bride, and the mourner from the bier. All home industries were paralysed while the manhood of the nation were in the field."

He must not allow himself to get entangled with civilian interests, when all his energies are supposed to be devoted to the war. He must, for the time, forswear anything, and everything, that would prejudice his soldiering.

A like sacrifice must be seen in the soldier of the Cross. He may find that he will have to give up certain things, certain interests, certain habits, certain amusements, even certain friends - not because any of these are wrong in themselves, but because they are a snare, an entanglement, to him; they get in the way of his success as a soldier.

He will not criticise his fellow Christians if they find no harm in such matters - it is not his business to criticize; though, when asked, he is free to give his opinion, and to explain the reason for his own avoidance.

Anything that interferes with our being the best that we can be for Him is to be sacrificed - however harmless it may be to others, and however attractive it may be to ourselves; even though it be so darling a possession as a hand, or a foot, or an eye, Matthew 18:8-9. Let it be made clear that there are many things in "**this life**" that, for the Christian soldier, are plain duty, family things, social affairs, business matters, that must be attended to - and done all the better for the very reason that he is a Christian - but the point lies in that word "**entanglement**": that is where the emphasis rests. When anything, however otherwise legitimate, becomes an entanglement, it must be severely, and sacrificially, dealt with.

Also (c) There are things to be obeyed - "**strive lawfully**". The Christian cannot do as he likes, any more than the athlete can make up his own rules, or follow his own dictates.

In the case of the Greek Games, which Paul was here thinking of, there were various laws to be observed by any competitor who desired to succeed - rules of the track, rules of the training. The one which I find so fascinating is that which requires that all entrants must show themselves to be True Born Greeks, none other were allowed to strive in the Arena: even as the Christian Race is open only to those who are New Born Christians.

That is the first and fundamental law of our running; and there are other commandments following. We are called upon to put aside our own wishes, to deny our own desires, and to perform only His will - "**not as I will, but as Thou wilt**", as the Master taught us (Matthew 26:39) by the blessed example of His own unique sacrifice.

So, by all these various implications, Paul impresses upon his protege the sacrificial nature of the life to which he has been called - whether as a private individual Christian, or as a public leader of the church. Self is to go, every time and all the time. I often think, and say, that Self is the believer's main problem. It has such a way of creeping in and spoiling things: self-consciousness, self-pity, self-importance, self-confidence, self-will, self-seeking. **"Let him deny himself"** - again we quote the Master's words. This is a law - perhaps the law: the Law of Success in Christian living. This is one of the things that we believers need most to understand - and, having grasped, need most to practice.

"I must decrease," says John the Baptist, with becoming modesty; and that for the simple reason that it is of the very warp and woof of his ministry that **"He must increase,"** John 3:30. Or, to quote our Paul's secret, **"Not I, but Christ"**, Galatians 2:20. Is anyone inclined to say that this is hard doctrine which we have been preaching? Well - not **"we,"** it is Paul; and really, not he, but the HOLY SPIRIT Who inspired him.

However, does it all sound too hard and too harsh, too forbidding, all this about the strenuous, and the sacrificial nature of what is required of us? All right; let us end on a different note, which also every Christian should understand:

THE SATISFYING NATURE OF THE CHRISTIAN SERVICE

In spite of the present cost, it is all so infinitely worth-while. If, from down here, we look on, or if, from up there, we look back, we shall confess how gloriously desirable the life has turned out to be. **"I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed . . ."**, says Romans 8:18. **"He had respect unto the recompence of the reward,"** says Hebrews 11:26. **"Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame"**, says Hebrews 12:2. Well, what has our present passage to say about these abundantly satisfying delights?

Take that phrase (a) **"Partaker of the fruits"**. That means, doesn't it, that we shall ourselves receive some enjoyment and enrichment from our labours. Done for Him, and done for others, yet we ourselves shall have gains for our pains. One is forcibly reminded of that beautiful provision in Deuteronomy 25:4: **"Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn."**

That is a hard job that the poor beast has got, very tiring and very boring; but why take his muzzle off? So that even while he treads the corn, he may eat of the corn. Working for others, he is a gainer himself. While he feeds others, he himself is fed. A beautiful provision of GOD for His dumb creatures' welfare; and, after a spiritual manner, a beautiful rule of His service. Is our Christian work strenuous and sacrificial? Well, our own soul will be satisfied in it. That is the grateful testimony of every earnest Christian worker right down the years.

Then (b) **"Crowned"**. What is this about a crown? Why, this is the reward of the Returning Lord for His faithful servants, **"Behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give to every man according as his work shall be,"** (Revelation 22:12). This is the award which, in Paul's eyes, was worth all the "toil and sweat and tears" of his utmost endeavouring, **"Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I**

press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," (Philippians 3:13-14).

Dwell for a bit on that "upward" calling for the prize, the crown. Presiding over the Greek Games would be some important personage, perhaps even the Emperor himself. From his "royal" box, perched high at the top of the tiered seats, he would watch the contests. When the programme was completed, this Person would distribute the awards. A herald, in announcing the name of a winner, would call him to come upward to the Box to receive his Prize, amid the plaudits of the crowd - he had successfully pressed toward the mark, and now he has come to receive a prize at the upward calling.

So will it be when Earth's Programme is done. The Lord has watched us from His throne, as Alice Janvrin sings:

"He who died for us is watching
From the skies."

When the time of the awards has come, He will give to those who have [not after the manner of Galatians 5:7] "**run well**" to the end, the "call" to come "upward", to receive their "prize", their "crown" at His hands.

What then will they think of their strenuousness and of their sacrifices? The "fruits" now, and the "crown" then, will vastly outweigh any giving-up there may have been. When a man said to Hudson Taylor, "You must have made many sacrifices", the veteran missionary replied, almost angrily, "Sir, I never made a sacrifice in my life". It was his experience of the generous grace of his Master, that he always got more than he gave. But, if we want the gains, we must have the pains; or, as Dr. Alfred Plummer said, in summing this matter up, "No cross, no crown!"

But there is one more thing which is, after all, better than anything we have already said: (c) "**He may please Him.**" What greater glory can a human being have, what deeper joy can he experience, than to win a smile from his Lord?

(i) At the start, GOD chose them - chose them to be soldiers. Do you say that bars you out, because you are so feeble and insignificant that He would never choose you to be a soldier? Oh, but wait a moment: listen to this, "**Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called** [He doesn't say 'not any', but 'not many']. **But GOD hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and GOD hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not** [the mere nonentities] **to bring to nought things that are** [powers that be]: **that no flesh should glory in His presence**", I Corinthians 1:26-29.

He has deliberately chosen just such unlikely people, because, when they accomplish anything for GOD, it could not possibly reflect any glory on themselves, all the glory must go to GOD, Who enabled them. After all that, you cannot doubt that He is prepared to enroll you; and if you company with those unentangled enthusiasts of His army, you will share their joy and privilege, for:

(ii) At the end, they please GOD. It is a happy thing if we can please others. There is a type of Christian that seems to regard it as a mark of grace if they continually put people's backs up, and are thoroughly unpopular. Surely not! If you can please people, so much the better; but always the first thing, and the chief thing, is to please Him.

One bitterly cold winter's morning, long before the War, the business men, warmly and snugly wrapped up, arrived at their city terminus, to be met with the ticket-collectors' chorus, "All seasons, please!"

So they had to unwrap and unbutton, to search in every pocket for the ticket that, of course, they had forgotten that morning and had left at home. Tempers ran out, and strong words, likewise. As one man came to the barrier he said to the collector,

"I'm afraid you're not very popular this morning", to which the official replied, with a grin, "Well, I don't care so long as I'm popular up there" - pointing to the office of the General Manager of the Line. Splendid if he could manage to retain his popularity with the passengers, but the principal thing, the essential thing, was to be well-thought of by the Company.

Would you deem me irreverent if, pointing my finger heavenwards, I say that the thing that counts is to be "popular up there"? - "**that he may please Him who hath chosen him to be a soldier**". To receive His smile - what honour, what ineffable happiness, what all embracing satisfaction, And we haven't to wait till the end to receive it, for, as Hebrews 11:5 says of Enoch, "**before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased GOD.**"

Having come with me thus far, do you wonder that both Timothy and we need strength to carry out what has been laid before us? It will have to be a strength beyond our own. Very affectionately Paul reminds Timothy of that strength before ever he shows him why he will so badly need it. In the opening verse: "**My son**" - it is "my child," really; so affectionately does this father think of his son in the faith - "**be strong** [strengthen yourself] **in the grace that is in Christ Jesus**".

You will only adequately strengthen yourself when you learn day by day to draw upon His grace which alone is sufficient to strengthen you for a life so strategic, so strenuous, so sacrificial - and withal, so satisfying,

That will be, as we shall see later on, the very last word that the Apostle will write to him: "**Grace be with you. Amen.**"

~ end of chapter 5 ~
