

The Servant of the Lord

2 Timothy 2



As most of you have probably heard by now, our theme for next year will be called “Stepping Up”. I think that’s a wonderful theme, and I look forward to all the preaching and teaching we’ll be doing on it, but before we get that far, we have to recognize that the theme itself has some significant implications. If all of us are supposed to step up, then being a do-nothing Christian isn’t good enough for any of us. In God’s eyes, a Christian who doesn’t do anything isn’t any better than a car that won’t start. Neither one is serving the purpose for which it was made.

All of us who are workers, then, need to keep working, and those of us who aren’t working need to start. We can’t be pew-sitters. We have to be servants. This is not an easy process. Why should we work? How can we make ourselves effective workers? We see these questions, and many more, answered in Paul’s discussion in 2 Timothy 2 of the characteristics of the servant of the Lord.

The first context in this chapter is about the importance of **REMEMBERING JESUS CHRIST**. Let’s read here from 2 Timothy 2:1-13. Paul’s instruction to Timothy here is twofold. He has to work, and he has to recruit others who will be faithful workers too.

However, this has to be done on God’s terms, not our terms. As Paul points out, this is nothing more than common sense. Soldiers have to obey orders. Athletes have to follow the rules. Farmers have to work hard. Otherwise, they don’t get the rewards appropriate to their station.

We have to approach Christianity with the same perspective. Paul says that his faithful service to Christ, even to the point of suffering, is based on his understanding of Christ. Here, let’s pay particular attention to the last few verses of the reading. Paul portrays Jesus as utterly faithful. If we honor and serve Him, He will reward us. If we deny Him and are faithless, He will punish us.

In both cases, the reason is the same: Jesus cannot deny Himself. We can break our promises, but Jesus can't, and that's true, whether the promises are beneficial or harmful. His reaction is certain. Our decisions are up to us.

The next time we're at a spiritual crossroads, then, let's remember Jesus. The next time we have an opportunity to speak up to a friend or co-worker, the next time we are tempted to secret sin, let's remember Jesus. We know His expectations, and we know that He is watching. The choice we make will either please Him or disappoint Him, and someday, we're going to have to give an account for that choice. Even to the point of suffering, the right thing to do is the right decision.

Next, we see Paul explain what will make each of us **AN APPROVED WORKER**. Turn your attention to 2 Timothy 2:14-19. This is a passage about our relationship with God's word. Paul tells us that there are two ways that we can be.

First, we can be that approved worker. In years past, brethren have used the KJV rendering of this text to make some points that the text really doesn't. "Study to show yourself approved" isn't about getting out the concordance. It simply means to work hard. In the same way, "rightly dividing the word of truth" isn't about dividing the Bible into the Old Testament and the New Testament. It's about knowing how to use the word.

Overall, the image here is of the Scriptures as a tool, like a paintbrush or a hammer. Like a tradesman, we're responsible for developing skill in our use of the law of Christ. That way, we can handle it effectively when the need arises.

Sadly, there are Christians, both then and now, who misuse the Scriptures. They argue about points that aren't really very important. At their worst, such people can alienate brethren or lead them away into error. Before we go pinning this label on others we have known, we'd best consider ourselves. Do I get carried away by my Scriptural hobby horses? Can I get into it with brethren over minor disagreements? If so, I'm in danger of falling under this condemnation.

However, the bad workmanship of such people can't change the truth. God still knows who belongs to Him, and those who do belong to Him are responsible for serving Him.

Finally, we should seek to become **VESSELS OF HONOR**. Consider 2 Timothy 2:20-26. In many ways, Paul's discussion here parallels my introduction. He also says that there are two kinds of Christians: those that are prepared for honorable use, and those that aren't prepared, and so are fit only for dishonorable use. To put things another way, in God's house, every Christian is either the fine china or the trash can, and it is the choices that we make that determine which we are.

There are two ways that we have to prepare. The first is by getting sin out of our lives. We might think that our sin has no consequences if we don't get caught, but in reality, every sin we commit changes who we are. Sin in our lives is like termites in a house. Left unchecked, it will render us useless and destroy us. Instead, we need to seek the virtues that will make us more useful: faith, love, and peace.

Second, we must beware of foolish, ignorant controversy. This was a serious problem 2000 years ago, and it continues to be a serious problem today. Christians who would never think of getting drunk or committing adultery somehow have no problem with stirring up strife in the church. Brethren, we need to look on the latter as just as deadly as the former, and we have to be vigilant for any appearance of contentiousness in our lives or even in our hearts.

Instead, Paul says, one of the things that will make us most useful is knowing how to handle disagreement in a patient, kind manner. Just because a brother says something we don't agree with doesn't mean we have to get angry at them. For that matter, we don't even have to get angry at them when they're trying to make us angry! Differences of opinion are inevitable, but we can always choose not to have an argument.

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