

The Good Soldier of Jesus Christ

“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” 2Ti 2:3

Introduction

The epistle of Second Timothy is considered to be one of Paul’s most personal letters. He is writing during his second and final imprisonment to his trusted and beloved son in the faith. Paul knows his execution is imminent. His concern is not for himself, but for Timothy, who must continue in the spiritual battle. His theme, “the good soldier of Jesus Christ” follows that of first Timothy, “*Fight the good fight*” (1Ti 1:18; 6:12).

Whereas First Timothy deals more with strategy, or the oversight of the Church (1Ti 3:14–15), this epistle is more focused on tactics—the need for Timothy to endure hardships, resist the growing onslaught of early Gnostic teaching, and stand firm in his faith and ministry. Ephesus, Timothy’s toughest assignment, was at this time being wracked by destructive teachings, which called for great spiritual wisdom and courage.

This letter was written in late 67 A.D. Winter is coming (4:21); Paul knows his execution is approaching (4:7–8). He urges Timothy to come to him with all speed, desiring to share final mutual encouragement, in order to strengthen the younger minister. Our desire is to study the epistle to gain practical instruction for our time, without losing sight of the historical setting and final courageous battle of the great apostle.

In keeping with our chosen theme, the outline is built around short, imperative statements, designed to challenge us to adapt Paul’s teaching in practical and powerful ways, to become “*a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*”

The life of Timothy can be of great assurance to believers today. Coming from a divided home and being of a sensitive and timid nature, this young man stands as a testament to the power of God’s Word and the mighty working of the Spirit of God—turning an unlikely candidate for spiritual warfare into a true spiritual warrior.

Chapter One: Choosing the High Ground—Use Your Gift (2Ti 1:6–7)

The Mental Attitude of the Spiritual Warrior

“Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands, For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”

Paul exhorts Timothy to valiantly utilize his gift, knowing that he possesses the promise of life (1:1), the power of God (1:8), and the pattern of sound doctrine (1:13). If he lives in light of them, he will have no cause for fear at the Bema Seat of Christ (1:12, 18). The true Christian soldier battles daily in prayer, obedience, and ministry for the benefit and blessing of other members of God’s royal family (Rom 12:1–13).

1. Do your duty in light of the promise of God, 1:1–7
Every believer has a “*gift and calling*” (Rom 11:29; 1Co 12:4–7; 1Pe 4:10–11).
 - a. The supply line of grace, vv. 1–2
Note the chain of command, as well as the flow of spiritual supply.
 - b. The heritage of faith, vv. 3–7
How the men of his family failed; how the women prevailed (Act 16:1–2).

2. Stand unashamed in the power of Christ, 1:8–12
Note the “bookends” (1:12; 4:8). Courage is the product of conviction.
 - a. The manifestation of power, vv. 8–10
The incarnation and resurrection illustrate the power available to us.
 - b. The ministry of power, vv. 11–12
God appoints our service; our work in it is our eternal “bank account.”

3. Stand guard over the Spirit-revealed pattern, 1:13–18
Two patterns to follow: God’s Word (2Ti 1:13) and Paul’s example (1Ti 1:16).
 - a. The value of divine truth, vv. 13–14
Biblical truth is a treasure to seize (“*hold fast*”) and to guard (“*keep*”).
 - b. The victory of faithful men, vv. 15–18
Faithfulness brings blessing in time, eternal reward (Mat 5:7; Jam 2:13).

Illustration

Read Numbers 13–14; see how Joshua and Caleb stood as examples of courage and strength, in contrast to the other spies. Consider how the unfaithful spies brought discouragement and cursing to an entire generation. Which pattern will you choose to follow in this present generation?

Summary/Application

1. The foundation of all spiritual life is faith in Jesus Christ (Mat 7:24; 1Co 3:1).
2. At salvation, the believer is entrusted with great spiritual assets (Eph 1:3).
3. Among these is a spiritual gift intended to bless others (1Co 12:4–7; Rom 11:29).
4. Faithful use of our gift is how we thank God daily for His grace (1Ti 1:12–17).
5. Our gift determines the part we should play in the Body of Christ (1Co 12).

6. God's Spirit uses His Word to do His will/work in our lives (2Co 3:16–18).
7. We will give an account of how we have used God's gifts (Rom 14:10; 2Co 5:10).

Chapter Two: Utilizing Force-Multiplication—Train Others (2Ti 2:1, 2)

The Training and Equipping of the Spiritual Warrior

“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus ... and the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

Every great undertaking demands strength. True strength is more than just raw power. It is power channeled through skill. All skill must be tested, and this assumes a final accounting of one's ability. There is no greater undertaking than the Christian life, and we are all being tested in life. Our evaluation will come at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

1. Lay hold of strength to endure all hardships, 2:1–13
God's grace is always sufficient, if we will claim it in faith (2Co 12:7–10).
 - a. Utilize the power of grace, vv. 1–6
We gain the power of grace by knowing and living by the Word (Rom 10:17).
 - b. Focus on the promise of faith, vv. 7–13
As the “seed of David” Christ will reign forever (2Sa 7:11–16; 1Ti 6:15).
2. Develop your strength to become a faithful workman, 2:14–26
Bible study must lead to purification if we are to be “useful vessels” (Tit 1:15).
 - a. Follow accurate teaching, vv. 14–19
Every spiritual battle is over truth, which leads to conformity (2Co 3:17–18).
 - b. Practice effective living, vv. 20–26
The passive part is “hearing,” the active part is to “doing” (Jam 1:22–27).

Illustration

One of the great examples of the testing of faith is found in the story of Joseph (Genesis 37–50). His faith in the promise of God was repeatedly tested and, each time, Joseph's wisdom and skill prevailed. Faith is most tested by betrayal and injustice. Yet, see how great was God's blessing on Joseph, exalting him to be second only to Pharaoh. Yet how much greater is the promise of reigning with Jesus Christ forever!

Summary/Application

1. God permits trials in our lives to strengthen and purify our faith (Jam 1:2–5).
2. These trials provide opportunity for honor and glory in eternity (1Pe 1:6–9).
3. Also, trials remind us of the need for purification of our lives (2Ti 2:19–22).
4. The evidence of spiritual growth is ability to discern good and evil (Heb 5:14).
5. When faith is victorious in time of trial, all glory goes to Christ, (2Co 12:7–10).
6. Yet to the degree that we glorify Jesus, we shall share His glory (Rom 8:17).
7. This is what Jesus meant by “[laying up] *treasure in heaven*” (Mat 6:20).

Chapter Three: Advance to the Objective—Live the Word (2Ti 3:16–17)

The Spiritual Warrior on the Offensive

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

What Paul calls “*genuine faith*” (1:5) is faith in the revealed Word of God. Such faith “[works] *through love*” (Gal 5:6), being empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22–23). In this chapter, Paul portrays the spiritual battlefield as an ongoing struggle between truth and error—between truth-tellers and deceivers.

1. Use discernment to avoid evil, 3:1–9
Discernment is spiritual vision made clear by inner purification (Mat 6:22).
 - a. A tree is formed according to its root, vv. 1–5
The roots of a man are attitude and motivation (Heb 4:12–13; Mat 23:25).
 - b. A tree is known by its fruit, vv. 6–9
Spiritual roots may be hidden, but the fruits cannot (Gal 5:19–26).

2. Pursue the ideal of Christian knighthood, 3:10–17
Aim high, endure bravely, and train incessantly (2Co 10:3–6; Eph 6:10–18).
 - a. Follow Paul’s example, vv. 10–13
Disciples aim at the ideal (Joh 13:15), using imperfect examples (1Co 11:1).
 - b. Persevere in the Word, vv. 14–17
Faithfulness honors our spiritual heritage and secures our spiritual progeny. The faithful disciple brings reward to his teacher (2Jo 8) and also lays a firm foundation for the lives of those who will follow after him (1Ti 4:12–16).

Illustration

In verse 8, Paul mentions Jannes and Jambres, the magicians of Pharaoh who resisted Moses. Going back to Exodus 7–9, we see that they were able—by demonic power—to imitate many of Moses’ mighty feats. In the end, they were compelled to acknowledge the true God (Exo 8:19), and were unable to stand before Moses, coming under the wrath of God (Exo 9:11). No deceiver will long be able to withstand the power of the truth of God’s Word.

Summary/Application

1. The whole spiritual war is fought over truth vs. falsehood (1Jo 2:18–23).
2. Central to God’s truth is the Person and work of Jesus Christ (Gal 6:14).
3. Every biblical doctrine stands on the validity of the cross (1Co 1:17–18, 2:2).
4. The preaching of the Gospel is the proclamation of victory, (1Ti 6:15, 2Ti 1:10).
5. The teacher’s life should validate the power of his message (2Ti 3:10–11).
6. To preach the Gospel and live as slaves to sin is destructive to others (2Pe 2:18–19).
7. This explains the emphasis on examples in Scripture (Joh 13:15; 1Ti 4:12).

Chapter Four: Anticipating the Victory—Finish Your Race (4:2, 5)

The Spiritual Warriors Refusal to Surrender

“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching ... But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

On the spiritual battlefield, the only counter to religious lies is biblical truth. The destructive work of corrupted hirelings can only be overcome by faithful men who are resolute—both in their teaching and in their lives. Paul, therefore, places Timothy under a solemn charge. He warns him again (cf. 1:6, 11, 14, 18; 2:4, 10, 15, 21; 3:14) that his life and ministry will come under scrutiny by the Lord Himself, as will ours.

1. Keep your eyes on eternity (4:1–8)
End-times apostasy should not blind us to our mission or our inheritance.
 - a. Proclaim the truth (vv. 1–5)
Faithfulness—not popularity—is the prize of ministry (1Co 4:1–2; 2Co 10:18).
 - b. Pursue the prize (vv. 6–8)
Paul’s assurance (1:12) is now seen as a secure possession (Phi 3:13–14).
2. Distinguish comrades from casualties (4:9–22)
This life is God’s threshing-floor to sift the souls of men (Jer 15:19; Mat 3:12).
 - a. Identify winners and losers vv. 9–16
“Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1Co 10:12; Col 4:14).
 - b. Emulate Paul’s last stand, vv. 17–22
Note the three tenses of deliverance here with those found in 2Co 1:10.

Illustration

The faithful servant of God is not one who has never failed. Rather, it is one who has learned from failure, recovered from it, and become even stronger by it. John Mark (4:11) was this type of man. Early in his career, he failed due to fear (Act 13:13). The word *“departing”* literally means “to desert.” As a result, Paul refused to take him along again (Act 15:37–41). Peter took Mark under his wing (1Pe 4:13), and the result was the Gospel of Mark. Now, even Paul finds Mark “useful” in the ministry. All believers fall, but the great ones rise up and press on (Pro 24:16).

Summary/Application

1. The test of all true ministry is the revealed Word of God (Isa 8:20; Gal 6:16).
2. Faithful ministers know, preach, and live by the Bible (1Ti 4:14–16, 6:11–14).
3. Only the Bible gives authority to rebuke and correct error, (2Ti 3:16–17, 4:2).
4. Thus, modern-day Christianity “will not endure sound doctrine” (1Ti 4:1–3).
5. The servant of God must stand firm against popular apostasy (2Ti 3:1–12).
6. History—like this chapter—is littered with men who fell from grace (Gal 5:1–7).
7. But those who “[fight] *the good fight*” will gain the prize (Phi 3:14; 2Ti 4:8).