

The Lord Will Give You Understanding

Text:

II Timothy 2:7

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. 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. 2:6 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.

8 Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel: 9 Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, *even* unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. 10 Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. 11 *It is* a faithful saying:

For if we be dead with *him*, we shall also live with *him*:

12 If we suffer, we shall also reign with *him*:

if we deny *him*, he also will deny us:

13 If we believe not, *yet* he abideth faithful:

he cannot deny himself.

Introduction:

This passage continues Paul's instructions for Timothy. It contains five specific commands. They are:

- To be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, (v. 1)
- To commit or entrust the teaching that he has received from Paul to others who will in turn faithfully communicate it to others, (v. 2)
- To endure hardship with Paul as a good soldier of Jesus Christ (v. 3)
- To meditate upon what Paul is saying to him in order that the Lord might give him insight, (v. 7)
- To remember that Christ has risen from the dead, (v. 8)

We considered the first two commands last time when we thought about the three deposits: the deposit we make with God, the deposit God makes with us, and the deposit we are to make with others.

Today I want us to consider the third and especially the fourth of these commands. He has previously given the third command to Timothy in chapter 1 verse 8 where he says: "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God." The word translated here "be thou partaker of the afflictions" (in Greek that is a single word) is exactly the same word that in today's text is translated "endure hardship". To get the full meaning here we should translate it "endure hardship with me". Paul in both cases is only asking Timothy to be willing to do what he is doing; to not be like the others he names in the letter who have abandoned him in his hour of trial, but like Onisiphorous, to stand with him as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

This command to endure hardship with him is then reinforced by three images: first a soldier, then an athlete, and finally a farmer, all of whom are willing to endure hardship in order to obtain a desired result. The soldier, he says, gives up his own ambitions in order that he might please him who has enlisted him into military service. The athlete is willing to submit to an onerous time of training in order that he might be crowned with the victor's wreath. Paul uses this wreath in other passages to speak of the reward that we hope to receive from Jesus Christ. For example in a passage we have already considered, speaking of himself he

says: "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (II Timothy 4:6-8). Finally he uses the image of a hard working farmer. Here the emphasis is on the fact that the farmer does not immediately see the result of his hard work, but must be patient and wait for the harvest. This is the same point he is making in Galatians 6:7-9 when he says: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

Having given these three images as illustrations of "enduring hardship", Paul then gives a command in verse seven that we could easily miss in reading this text. He says: "Timothy, Think or meditate on these things, i.e. these images that I have just given you, and the Lord will give you insight into what I am saying." This is what I want us to focus on today. Some commands require only immediate and direct obedience, others are of a different nature and must be assimilated through reflection. The first type have to do with specific acts; the second with character. The first require only simple comprehension; the second divine insight. For example a parent might say to their child: "please take out the trash". That is a simple straightforward command that requires little thought or reflection to fulfill; only an act of will and a bit of energy. On the other hand the same parent might say to the same child: "you are growing older and are not longer a little child. It is time that you begin to become a responsible member of the family." This is an altogether different kind of command. It does not involve the performance of any specific act, but rather the development of a new attitude and of new character traits. The child cannot, in this case, perform a simple act, then quickly forget what was said and return to whatever he was doing before.

For the command to have an effect the child must truly take it the heart. He must say to himself: "what my parents are saying is right. It is true that I am no longer a little child who receives everything and does nothing in return. I really do want to contribute something to the life of our family." Without this recognition the parents command will be soon forgotten and will go entirely

unheeded. But even if the child acknowledges the truth of what the parents have said, and is willing to act upon it, this is only the beginning of the process. He must reflect upon what it means for him at his age to be a responsible member of his family. He must talk with his parent about it and begin to see himself differently than he has in the past. Unless he has a new vision, there will be no important change in attitude or action. But once he has a new vision of himself and of his role in the family, this will become the basis of an ongoing development.

Now, let's apply this image to what Paul is saying in our text and to our lives as Christians. Sometimes Christians imagine the Christian life as a simple performance of commands. They are task oriented. What they want is a check list of things to do, so that like the child taking out the trash, they can get to them, get them done, and then return to what they really wanted to do. The truth is that most biblical commands are not of that nature they are rather of the second sort. They involve not the performance of tasks, but the transformation of character. To illustrate what I am saying let me give you a random sampling from the New Testament: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:31). "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:1-2). "If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. *Let nothing be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:1-5). "But grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him *be* glory both now and forever" (II Peter 3:18).

None of these commands, like a host of others in the Bible, can be performed as a simple act of will. Their aim is not our acts, but our character. They are not

telling us to do something so much as they are telling us to become something. This transformation of character is not the performance of a single act, but a life-long process. At the heart of this process is what Paul is referring to in verse 7 when he says: Think (or reflect or meditate) on these things and the Lord will give you understanding or insight.”

Notice first of all that this is a divine process. It is God who ultimately gives us insight into his truth so that we may live it out concretely and individually. “The Lord, Paul says to Timothy, will give you understanding. The technical term for what is described in this verse is illumination. Illumination is when the Holy Spirit who indwells the believer takes the Word of God and shines its truth upon the concrete reality of the life of an individual. At this point the commands of Scripture take on specific meaning. Since each of us are individuals, for the Word of God to do its full work it must become personal for each of us. Let me take as an example the last command I gave you in the list: “Grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.” One of the things that the Holy Spirit will teach each of us as we meditate upon a passage of that nature is the things that are keeping us from growing, but those things will not be the same for all. To one it will be one thing and to another something else, but the Holy Spirit will reveal to all of us as we quietly reflect upon these words that there are things that are hindering our growth that we must put away if we are to “grow up into him who is the head, even Christ.”

Finally, it must be noted that even though this is a work of God, it requires action on our part. It is the Lord who will give us the insight we need to become the person He wants us to be, and to act as he wants us to act, but that can only take place when we “think on these things.” Our part is to assimilate God’s truth, to hide it in our hearts, to meditate on it day and night, to not be forgetful hearers of the Word. This will require deliberate and continuous effort on our part. As in the case of the child we used as an illustration earlier who decides to heed the counsel of his parents to become a responsible member of the family, the journey begins with the decision, but it continues with a commitment to a life of reflection on the question. So the believer begins with a decision to be a true follower of Jesus Christ, but that decision must be followed by a commitment to a life of reflection and prayer in openness to the Holy Spirit. We must be constantly reflecting on these words, so that the Lord can give us understanding.

