

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## Passing on the Torch: Be strong in the grace - 2 Timothy 2:1

*"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus"* 2 Timothy 2:1. Do you remember your chemistry lessons? I always thought I was doing pretty well if the compound I made looked the right colour, or made the right smells. But that was never enough. It was then necessary to split the compound up into its constituent chemicals, and then it was necessary to understand that those elements could be further split up to electrons in circles going around a nucleus. What confusion! Why was a look at the whole never sufficient?

As we continue our look at the way in which the truth of God, and our responsibility to maintain it, is passed from one generation to the next, we come to 2 Timothy 2:1. To help us to understand what Paul has to say to Timothy, and to learn the lessons for our own lives, I want to do what I so disliked in those chemistry lessons, and split the verse into six bite sized phrases. Hopefully, however, it will not lead to confusion, but to a very real sense of our role in the grand scheme of the church, which has run from Pentecost, and shall continue until the Lord Jesus comes.

### 1. You therefore.

Paul would nail Timothy down so to speak. In chapter 1, Paul had spoken of the gift that Timothy had. Paul had referred to the suffering that he had endured in his faithful service to God, as well as the sorrow he felt when others had abandoned him. As he comes to the beginning of chapter 2, then, Paul says to Timothy that it is now up to him. Timothy was maybe into his thirties by now and perhaps prone to timidity and introspection. Perhaps he looked to others to take a lead, happy to do as he was told, to remain in the huge shadow of Paul. And yet Paul would have none of this. He recognised the abilities of the younger man, and very directly says it is now his turn. Not the person next to Timothy, or somebody older, or who knew more, but "you Timothy, yes you!" All too often we behave like Timothy might have wanted to. We see that others are growing old, unable to continue doing all that they used to do in their younger days. But then we look around and see that somebody else could do this job, or fill that role. On my wife's recent birthday, she said that she still felt only as old as she did when she was at university. I, on the other hand, feel ready for a bath chair on the front at Bournemouth! Too often we fall into one of these two camps in our spiritual lives. We are either too young to really accept responsibility for the work that others need to pass on, or we are too old to start getting involved in a work that is better left to others. In short it is better that somebody, anybody else take on the responsibility for the welfare of the local church life, and the Christian witness associated with it. It reminds me of the telling story I once saw on a tea towel!

"This is the story of four people named everybody, somebody, anybody and nobody. There was an important job to be done and everybody was sure that somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that because it was everybody's job. Everybody thought anybody could do it but nobody realised that somebody wouldn't do it. It ended up that everybody blamed somebody when nobody did what anybody could have done!"

This morning, let each one of us, especially those who are younger, realise that the future of the testimony of Jesus Christ is my responsibility and let us take up that challenge.

### 2. My son.

The affection that Paul had for Timothy was quite clear. As he looked at Timothy, it was with all the concern and pride that an earthly father might look at a natural son as he sees him growing into the man that he was to become. Today we are familiar with the SKINS acronym – Spending the Kids Inheritance Now! With little concern for the future, these older ones want to live for today. Whilst that may be acceptable in the material world, such an attitude is completely unacceptable in the spiritual world. Dear older listener, as you look at the youngsters in your local church, they are your spiritual children. They are not to be viewed as the awkward ones who always want to change what you like. They are not the ones who do things that you would never have dreamed of in your day. They are the ones who will have to continue your life work, the ones who will have to maintain the truth and the testimony in tomorrow's world. There is a challenging episode in the history of the Israelites in Joshua 15. Caleb had given his daughter in marriage to Othniel, who had proved his worth as a husband, by occupying a part of the land that God had given to the Israelites. As a marriage portion, Caleb gave his daughter land in the southern Negev, a dry, hard land. In visionary

faith, Achsah goes to her father and in verse 19 says, “Give me a blessing; since you have given me land in the south, give me also springs of water.’ So he gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.” We might well ask ourselves what sort of inheritance spiritually are we passing on to the next generation? Sometimes I despair when I hear older ones reminiscing about how good things used to be in such and such a place in the fifties. Not only are we responsible for what we pass on, we are responsible to pass it on in a living way, a way that has hope of future life. For Caleb, and for Paul, who realised the truth of this, it simply would not do that things would continue for their last few years. They had a vision that lasted far into the future. Should the Lord leave His people here for another thousand years, we need to ensure that what we have held precious is passed on in such a way that it can continue for all that time.

### 3. Be strong.

Yes, timid Timothy, be strong! No doubt Timothy could have listed so many reasons why he was not the man, so many faults. Paul would have none of it, telling him simply to be strong. Frequently the fighting is at its most fierce shortly before the end of the fight, when those who are losing know there is little left to lose, just before they lose heart. It seems to me that in the historic plan of God for His church, this is exactly the time we are living in now. The victory is ours with Him. The Devil is a defeated enemy and knows that his time of influence is rapidly evaporating. So his attacks against all that is of God are increasingly frenetic. Attacks upon the family, upon the rule of law, upon the concept of right and wrong, upon absolutes, upon the authority of the word of God - all these point to the actions of the enemy. Without doubt today is the day to be strong. Now is not the time to compromise with the world, to give up on the absolute truth of His word, to desert the position He has put me in. Jesus is coming again soon and then there will be no more need to struggle, but for now, be strong. Let us quietly join the ranks of the mighty strong in Scripture who in their day stood up and were counted for God. I think of Moses, Aaron and Hur who, when Moses’ arms grew weary, were there to support him. You can read the story for yourself in Exodus 17. The world would say it was shameful that an old man couldn’t even have a rest after being out in the sun for so long. But for Moses partial victories were not enough. He would stay the course, until the victory was complete. I think of Joshua, who in Joshua 10 prayed that God would stop the sun from setting so that he could fully defeat the Amorites. He was ready to forgo the rest that nightfall would bring so that a future generation would be spared the danger of continued warfare against the Amorites. I think of Eleazar, one of David’s mighty men that we read about in 2 Samuel 23, who, when the Israelite army retreated, stood his ground all alone, fighting single handed until the sword he used stuck to his hand. This was his field, given to him by his father, and his father before him. Was one field really so important? The soil, the grass certainly was not, but the fact that God had given him that piece of land made it priceless. In our day God has given us His word, and a place to live out that word. We ought not to devalue either by carelessly thinking that they do not matter. Finally, I think of Mary of Bethany, for not all strength is shown by endurance or battle. Undoubtedly the hardest battle we will ever fight is with our old self – that part of us that wants recognition, comfort and the nice things of life etc. It is Mary who best shows us how the victory is to be gained in this conflict. In front of her family, friends and neighbours she takes her hair and uses it as a towel to wipe the feet of Jesus (see John 12). On a human level how humiliating! Once Jesus had left, she would be left to face the smirks of her neighbours, unable to undo what she had done. And yet she gladly offers to Jesus her very self, as she, perhaps uniquely, had some insight into what the Lord was about to do. These are ordinary men and women who stand out from the pages of the Bible because of their sacrifice and strength. Timothy, you too were to be strong like these, as are we in our day and in this generation.

### 4. In the grace.

We do not fight this battle alone, nor in our own strength. Stubbornness could lead me to dig my heels in and say “no”. Too often the destructive force of a stubborn individual has had terrible effects upon the people of God. Timothy was to exercise this strength in the grace of God. Grace has been described by the acronym: God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense. All that we do for Him is to be done with the richness of God that has been given to us by the all surpassing sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on the cross at Calvary. God’s grace would make us small in the fight. *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” 2 Corinthians 8:9.* Our being strong should not lead us to dominate others by force, but rather we would lead others in gentle humility. But God’s grace is always more than enough for us in whatever circumstances we might find ourselves. It was for Eleazar, as alone, he watched the Philistine army swarm into his field. It is for us. *“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” 2 Corinthians 12:9.* Unlike the Israelite army that retreated and left Eleazar stranded, His grace will never leave us out on a limb. And not only that, but His grace is exclusive, for He is the God of all grace - there is no other source of supply! *“But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you” 1 Peter 5:10.* As Mary now experiences that eternal glory, there can be no doubt that she does not regret in the slightest the strength she displayed in the fight against self, as she anointed the feet of Jesus. One can only wonder how many others in Bethany now wish that they had done something for Jesus that night. And settle you! – that’s how the verse ends. So often in this world we live for the moment. We want to see results now and resent the week in, week out routine of service. In persevering we need the grace to be strong. Perhaps as a child you remember stacking up dominoes, before knocking one and watching it topple all the others in turn. Our lives can be

very much like those dominoes! If I am strong, then it makes it that little bit easier for those who follow after me to be strong. Conversely, if I give up, then those who follow after me are going to find it much harder just to recover lost ground, never mind advancing. If we are to see God honouring revival in 21st century Britain, and it is still possible, then it can only be by individuals, you and me, together being strong for Jesus, in the grace that He will liberally supply. Around the circumference of the one pound coins used to be the words “standing on the shoulders of giants.” Isaac Newton, who became one of this country’s most famous scientists, realised that his achievements were only possible because of what others had done before him. Spiritually we need to gain this perspective. We need to realise that we are indeed standing upon the shoulders of those who in their day were faithful to God, even to death, and it is upon our shoulders that others will one day stand!

## 5. That is.

The tenses of the promises of the Bible are always important. This is a case in point. The necessary grace is promised for now, and only now. The verse does not read, “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that was in Christ Jesus”, nor even “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that will be in Christ Jesus”. No it is “that is” and is only for now, today even. We say that we believe that Jesus is building His church, but do we really believe it? The practical consequences of it are profound. Sufficient for our consideration here, is that He never puts a brick out of place! I enjoy reading historical fiction and going to ruined castles and the like, sometimes to the exasperation of the rest of my family. I guess if I had the choice I might have chosen to be a believer back in the thirteenth century, a time when life seemed far simpler and more honourable. I love to visit North Wales, so perhaps I might have chosen to live there. But Jesus has other, better ideas for my life! He has chosen that I should be a part of His church in the 21st century, in Liverpool because that is where He has given the grace for me to be effective for Him, if I am obedient to His leading. Had I lived in the 13th century I would have done nothing for Him. Were I to live in Wales my life would be utterly fruitless. He has chosen that I live here and now. Now I don’t know why that is, but then that does not really matter. The Master builder is at work putting all things into His church in just the way that He wants to, until He has completed the building. In a day to come, it will be revealed as perfect, and perhaps then I shall see why He put me where He did. But for now it is sufficient to know that the grace of God, that enables me to be strong, is available now. It is no good my saying that I will take on responsibility when I am older, nor that I should have done so when I was younger. Today, whoever we are, let us realise that His grace will enable us to serve Him faithfully now, and to be strong now.

## 6. In Christ Jesus.

At work we have a quality control officer. She takes responsibility for ensuring that all the tests we do are performed reliably. However, up on the walls of the lab are charts showing how well we perform for each test. It is all about giving us all ownership of the scheme. If the tests are performing badly, then we can see that we need to improve. If the charts are good, then we can be pleased with our performance. In either event we do better because we feel that we belong. “In Christ Jesus” is a favourite phrase of Paul, and could easily fill a broadcast in itself. But certainly one of its aspects is that of belonging to Him. As we go on holiday to Wales, we always get the question, “Are we **in** Wales yet?” It is not until we see the sign that we know we are actually there, that we are able to know for sure where the boundary is. It means that, for example, Welsh law now applies, and in years gone by, this was very different from English law. To be in Wales means to belong there. The Welsh have a word for it – “*hiraeth*” – a sense of belonging, of home. It’s why after the Norman conquest, Norman soldiers were quite happy to accept English lands as their reward, but Welshmen never wanted land outside of Wales. As we draw to a close this morning, we very much need a sense of belonging to Jesus. We are not called to be strong for a cause that is not our own. We are not taking on responsibility for something that means nothing to us. All that we do for Him, we do because we belong to Him. What is important to Him is important to us because we belong to Him. The truth of God’s word, lived out in reality is important because it belongs to us. The desire to see souls saved belongs to us. The opportunity to remember Jesus in His death each week is important because it belongs to us. Because we are in Christ Jesus, those things that matter to Him should matter to us. As we realise this then let each one of us realise that Paul is speaking to us across the centuries: “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”

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