

# **Entrusted with The Gospel**

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**Thesis:** When entrusted with the Gospel, we must endure to the end.

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2 Timothy 2:1-13 English Standard Version:

You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. The saying is trustworthy, for:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;  
if we endure, we will also reign with him;  
if we deny him, he also will deny us;  
if we are faithless, he remains faithful—

for he cannot deny himself.

## Entrusted With The Gospel<sup>1</sup>

“Faith is not a storm cellar to which men and women can flee for refuge from the storms of life. It is, instead, an inner force that gives them the strength to face those storms and their consequences with serenity of spirit.”<sup>2</sup> The Apostle Paul was no stranger to storms, just by cracking open the book of Acts, we know he had a very rough life all stemming from the prophecy Jesus said about his life in Acts 9:16, “For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” Paul himself even highlights the many sorrows and struggles he has faced as he autobiographically lists his sufferings in ministry near the end of 2 Corinthians.<sup>3</sup> The Apostle Paul writes about this, encouraging his not-so-young-anymore protégé, Timothy in the last known letter we have from the Apostle. Paul knows his time is short, there is an urgency in which he writes this letter and a pressing need for him to make sure Timothy knows that he has been fully entrusted with the Gospel message. If there are any more lessons Paul can give to his son in the faith he made it a point to tell Timothy in this letter, specifically in this passage. He gives Timothy three attributes that come with the Gospel message that Timothy must consider: working as a good steward, suffering as a soldier, and remembering his purpose. These attributes Timothy must develop point him to the simple fact, when entrusted with the Gospel, we must endure to the end.

### Stewardship

Paul, from the very beginning is calling Timothy to stewardship. Up to this point Paul was introducing the few things he wanted Timothy to remember most importantly. Paul is after all, handing off the torch, entrusting Timothy with the Gospel, and so now he writes very forcefully, stating: “You, therefore, be strengthened”. The Greek phrase, “Σὺ οὖν, τέκνον μου, ἐνδυναμοῦ” is an

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture is from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Sam J. Ervin, Jr.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:16-33

imperative, a command. He is directly calling Timothy out. Though this isn't the first command Paul has given in the letter, it is the first time he is personally calling on Timothy to do something in light of what he has already commanded. Paul is practically saying, "Timothy, in light of what I have always told you, in light of everything I have taught you and showed you, BE STRENGTHENED."

It sounds like a tone shift, which makes sense in light of what we know of this letter. Paul may not have a second chance to say anything to Timothy after this. At the end of Second Timothy he asks him to come "before winter" but Paul also knows that this letter may be the last correspondence between the two of them if Timothy is held up for any reason. He carefully phrases exactly what he wants his last words to be to Timothy.

The word translated "strengthened" in this text literally means 'to be strong within' or 'to be strengthened inwardly'.<sup>4</sup> John Phillips commentates,

The word conveys the idea of strength of soul and purpose. The same word is used in Acts 9:22 to describe Paul himself. There we learn that soon after his remarkable conversion, "But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ." His resolve was so strong that "the Jews sought to kill him" (9:23). Now Paul looked for similar resolve in his 'son'.<sup>5</sup>

This was no moment for Timothy to be weak, Paul had poured his life's work into him and was asking him to continue without him, he needed to be strong and draw from the wellspring of grace that is available in Jesus Christ.

Being strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus can be understood in two different ways, opposition to the weakness of grace, or it may be understood in opposition to our being strong in our own strength. Where there is the truth of grace, such was the case of every believer; there must be a laboring after the strength of grace, to continue. As trials increase, we have a need to grow

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<sup>4</sup> Vincent, M. R, *Word studies in the New Testament*,(New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), 2 Ti 2:1, Logos.

<sup>5</sup> John Phillips, *Exploring the Pastoral Epistles*,(Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2004), 363.

stronger and stronger in what is good; our faith stronger, our resolution stronger, our love in Christ stronger.<sup>6</sup>

There is another word that Paul squeezes into this verse though, the vocative form of τέκνιον, which means “my child”. As a father exhorts his son, so Paul encourages Timothy, with forcefulness, but also with deep affection.<sup>7</sup> It is only after Paul comforts him with all this that he is ready to explain the why behind his imperative. Stewardship of the Gospel requires reliance on the strength only found in the grace of God. Paul’s description of the work which Timothy must do involves a commodity, “the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.”<sup>8</sup> With a use of another imperative, commanding Timothy to entrust, Paul is speaking about the apostolic message given to him to carry by God, the same body of material that Timothy was charged to guard in verse 1:14. He was called to follow in Paul’s example, an example that was approved of by the other Apostles<sup>9</sup> and had been proven effective throughout Paul’s life and ministry. Timothy had to entrust it, not bury it with himself or make it so that he alone was the only bearer of the message. Paul was encouraging, and commanding him to share the great message to people who would defend it from being amended or changed, a pressure Timothy both faced and was overcoming in Ephesus. The word entrusting carries with it more than just sharing the message, but also sharing the method, and holding to its

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<sup>6</sup> When Peter promised rather to die for Christ than to deny him he was only being strong in his own strength; he had something to prove and wanted to impress Jesus with his devotion to him. Had he been strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, he would have never disowned his King. What we should see in these verses is that there is grace in Jesus: “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ,” John 1:17. There is grace enough in him for all of us. Like Timothy, we must be strong in this grace; not in ourselves, in our own strength, or in the grace we have already received, but in the grace that is in him.

<sup>7</sup> Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: Complete and unabridged in one volume* (2 Ti 2:1–7). Peabody: Hendrickson.

<sup>8</sup> NIV 2 Timothy 2:2

<sup>9</sup> Galatians 2:2-10

purity. Timothy must have an eye for two things: their fidelity or integrity and their ministerial ability.<sup>10</sup> It seems to mimic Jesus' command to "make disciples". Timothy was to train them up in the faith and help them spread the message of Jesus crucified and risen. Every believer has received the true Gospel as a stewardship, carrying with them a timeless message that obligates it to be shared and taught. In the process of this message and lifestyle spreading like wildfire, Timothy was to be sure to maintain the message's purity, to silence false teachers, and to be faithful as he called others to be faithful.

### **Suffer as a Soldier**

Verse 3 begins with the third imperative of the passage, and perhaps the oddest command he gives Timothy. It is the beginning of a transition in his letter to encourage Timothy to stick it out. Paul knows there will be persecution awaiting Timothy if he heeds the first commands, to be strengthened and entrust the Gospel to others. So it is not a surprise that Paul would bring up suffering, but the way he does is intriguing. Paul commands it. He is trying to reach the heart of Timothy, his true son in the faith, letting him know that no matter how he slices the situation: The Gospel comes with suffering, so suffer well. Paul states, "Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." This ties back to the first part of the section, Paul encouraged him to be strengthened because he expected Timothy to stay the course. He didn't have the option to pull away, to leave the Gospel message unattended while other people much weaker in their faith and experience of Jesus suffered for Christ's sake. It's another hinted reminder to Timothy that fairly soon he will be the example people point to, Paul had shared to the point of execution, so the church as a whole and especially its leaders must also share in the cause of suffering. This is a re-emphasis of the same command Paul gave earlier in chapter one, verse 8, it is in this instance that Paul makes the

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<sup>10</sup> Vincent, 2 Tim. 2:2, Logos.

command more personal to Timothy and illustrates what it means for him. He uses three metaphors that Timothy would understand quite well: a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer to encourage him to share in the suffering of the saints.

### The Soldier

Paul emphasizes this particular metaphor slightly above the other two, stating it first, tying it to the imperative of suffering, and before explaining it. Soldiers are not just given a weapon, a uniform, and told to go and fight. People cannot just volunteer for service and go on a mission. There is training, there is drilling, there is a process of transforming the person they were into the person the commander wants them to be. A Marine recruiter once told me, “We don’t make you into Marines, we cut out everything within you that isn’t a Marine. You earn the title by killing yourself.” Soldiers are changed by experience.

Matthew Henry notes,

A soldier, when he has enlisted, leaves his calling, and all the business of it, that he may attend his captain’s orders. If we have given up ourselves to be Christ’s soldiers, we must sit loose to this world; and though there is no remedy, but we must employ ourselves in the affairs of this life while we are here (we have something to do here), we must not entangle ourselves with those affairs, so as by them to be diverted and drawn aside from our duty to God and the great concerns of our Christianity. Those who will war the good warfare must sit loose to this world. *That we may please him who hath chosen us to be soldiers.* Observe, that the great care of a soldier should be to please his general; so the great care of a Christian should be to please Christ, to approve ourselves to him. The way to please him who hath chosen us to be soldiers is not to entangle ourselves with the affairs of this life, but to be free from such entanglements as would hinder us in our holy warfare.<sup>11</sup>

Beyond this, there was also the cultural idea of a soldier that would have plagued Timothy’s mind as he was reading Paul’s expectations for him. Timothy wouldn’t have thought of a soldier as someone who protects, but as an agent of the empire, the empire that imprisoned his mentor. The Roman soldiers of the day were the toughest, most disciplined, and efficient soldiers in the world at

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<sup>11</sup> Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: Complete and unabridged in one volume* (2 Ti 2:1–7). Peabody: Hendrickson.

the time, they were the epitome of this metaphor. Roman soldiers did not quit for anything, especially a difficult task or dangerous situations, they did as the commander told them, or else. He knows his life is expendable and he must be prepared to lay it down if asked.

The cultural overtone of this image is huge; Josephus described the work of the Roman soldier in Wars of the Jews Book 3 as,

Each soldier every day throws all his energy into his drill, as though he were in action. Hence that perfect ease with which they sustain the shock of battle: no confusion breaks their customary formation, no panic paralyzes, no fatigue exhausts them. All their camp duties are performed with the same discipline, the same regard for security: the procuring of wood, food-supplies, and water, as required- each party has its allotted task; nothing is done without a word of command. The same precision is maintained on the battlefield; nothing is done unadvisedly or left to chance. This perfect discipline makes the army an ornament of peace-time and in war welds the whole into a single body; so compact are their ranks, so alert their movements, so quick their ears for orders, their eyes for signals, their hands to act upon them. None are slower than they in succumbing to suffering.<sup>12</sup>

It is this kind of dedication and determination that a “good soldier of Christ Jesus” must have. Just like the Roman soldier was required to be separate from the everyday affairs of the world and have all sense attuned to their commanders, so Timothy should be free from anything that can pull his attention away from his mission. It is this very concept that creates the deep tension of the Christian life: to be in the world but not of it. The metaphor is clear in implying separation, but this does not go to the extent of absolute departure, for Timothy had to engage the world around him in order to evangelize. The things that must be avoided were the values of the culture around him, which will always either subtly or overtly be in opposition to the Gospel Paul had entrusted Timothy with.

Ministry is also like the military in another respect, requiring total life commitment that is kept free from daily distractions. Paul is telling Timothy that this needs to be his mindset, “No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.” Paul,

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<sup>12</sup> Josephus, Wars of the Jews Book 3 72-108



through the Holy Spirit has instructed Timothy to contend for the faith multiple times, just a few paragraphs after this particular section Paul will deliver his famous “Preach the word!” digression. He has entrusted his Gospel to him, the very ministry that identified and consumed his life. The focus is laser thin. The aim is to please God, not get meddled in the civilian affairs around him, anything that would distract him from the Gospel.

Timothy knew this feeling well; he had been serving the church in Ephesus as a bishop, so he was already on active ministry duty in a place that was very strategic for the spread of Christianity. Like a soldier following orders, follow the lead of the one who enlists you.

### The Athlete

The second occupational illustration comes from the world of sports. “An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.” Wiersbe notes,

There are in Paul’s letters more than two dozen references to athletics—boxing, wrestling, running, to name a few. The Greeks and Romans were enthusiastic athletes (and spectators), and in this verse, Paul used the Olympic Games as an illustration of the practical life of the believer. No matter how skilled the athletes were, they had to obey the rules of the game. If they won the race but broke the rules, they were disqualified.<sup>13</sup>

The phrase is open to interpretation to whether or not playing by the rules meant according to the rules of the athletic event, or the rules governing each athlete. According to Litfin, “Competitors in the Olympic games, for example, were required to swear that they had trained diligently for at least 10 months.”<sup>14</sup> Though the second is in some ways easier to explain in light of the personal charge toward Timothy, the first idea is required by Paul’s grammar, which suggests that the issue is not whether one is qualified to compete but, among those competing, who will win

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<sup>13</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). *Wiersbe’s expository outlines on the New Testament* (646). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>14</sup> Litfin, A. D. (1985). 2 Timothy. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Ed.) (2 Ti 2:5). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

the crown. Underneath all of this is the silent charge for Timothy to keep his eyes on the prize, keeping his eyes focused on Jesus.

### The Farmer

As the athlete has man made rules to follow, so the farmer is contained by the laws of nature. He must go through the process of plowing and planting, watering and waiting in order to cultivate and reap months later. There is a tremendous toil involved with this work, the outcome and reward of said toil a long way off. Paul uses this metaphor to encourage Timothy in times of drought, to keep pressing on. There is always a reward for those who sow good seed. The chores are endless, and the summer is long, but the harvest is plentiful for the faithful farmer. The process starts all over again even after the joyous time of harvest and thanksgiving: The farmer's job never ends. However, the principle of labor and reward is very real with the eschatological atmosphere of 2 Timothy, leading readers to believe Paul was pointing to "that day" for diligent and faithful service. The principle is also played out for each time Timothy would find the joy of a person responding to the message entrusted to him. Phillips says, "The soul winner tastes the fruit when a person accepts Christ under his ministry. The pastor tastes the fruit when a young person whom he has been cultivating dedicates his life to full-time Christian service at home or abroad."<sup>15</sup>

### **Remember the Purpose**

Paul finishes the three metaphors stating, "Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything." The phrase literally means to perceive with the mind. Paul wants Timothy to truly give thought to the illustrations he listed, work out in his mind every implication.

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<sup>15</sup> Phillips, 369

Paul has confidence that the Lord will help Timothy do just that.<sup>16</sup> These three images reinforce the main command to share and persevere in the suffering.

At the end of the day, the illustrations of soldiers, athletes, or farmers wouldn't be enough to give Timothy something solid to hold on to through the trials he had waiting for him. The Gospel comes with suffering and Timothy was to be a sufferer. The call is clear, "share in suffering". Paul emphasized again and again throughout his letters and in his ministry that he suffered for the cause of Christ, and he suffered well. Now he reminds Timothy, but he gives him an image and an example that will carry him through, "Remember," our last imperative and probably the most important of them all, "Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!" We can get distracted by the mention of David in the middle of this, it seems awfully Jewish for Paul to be bringing him up.<sup>17</sup> Something Paul usually tried to steer away from due to the circumcision parties and false teaching, but here Paul digs at Timothy's Jewish roots to redefine the

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<sup>16</sup> Timothy of course should have pondered the metaphors in the order given to him: First as a steward. God gave him specific talents, knowledge of the truth, and plenty of opportunities to learn under Paul and Silas and to minister in the city of Ephesus. There are few men in all of history who had so much granted to him, and yet so much expected of him. The very fact that our canon of Scripture includes two personal letters to him is proof that the early church fathers viewed him in a very high light. Timothy was the on-going carrier of Paul's ministry. Timothy could not squelch all that he had. Paul pleaded with him to not throw away his training like Demas did. Second, he had to be a good soldier. The empire declared war on the church. Martyrdom was becoming more and more common. It was more important than ever for the church to have leaders who would not shrink from boldness. If regular soldiers could give their all for something as so shallow as the 'Glory of Rome', Timothy must be willing to press on without shrinking back, to fight the good fight, and be the example for the church. He could perhaps hear Paul's words, "Do not shirk your duty. You have your orders." Thirdly, he must consider the athlete, to stay trained and keep his eyes on the crown. When the corners could be cut, he should go the extra mile and train well, to continue to train forever. In the face of discouragement maintain the drive to win the prize. Finally, Timothy must be a diligent farmer. The farmer is always in for the long haul, through good seasons and droughts. He planted seed and was patient, not expecting rapid results.

<sup>17</sup> Towner, 171

three metaphors he used earlier. He does this by using one genealogy, the ultimate genealogy, not endless ones.<sup>18</sup> Jesus is the ultimate promise, the fulfilled David, the perfect type. He fulfilled all that David did and was. We remember David as the great King, and it's easy to see Jesus through that light, but before David was the King, he was a strong soldier and a successful farmer (shepherd). As King, he was a good steward, amassing great wealth and honor to hand down to his son Solomon. With one little Jewish interjection Paul gave Timothy the greatest image to model off of that he could, David, but even more, Jesus. He took these simple characteristics of David and elevated them into the spiritual level. Paul pleads with Timothy to remember, the Greek word (μνημονεβε) has a deeper meaning: Paul not only wants him to remember, but to keep thinking about this, recalling it constantly, having a thirst to remember and respond, remember and be forced to mention.<sup>19</sup> It forces me to think of Jeremiah when he said that the word of God was in his “heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.”<sup>20</sup> Paul wants that for Timothy, that there is a hope beyond the chains and the suffering. He concludes this point with the bold statement that “the word of God is not bound!” Preaching the good news about the crucified but resurrected Son of David was what had landed Paul in a Roman jail. With every move as he wrote or dictated this letter, the iron chains around his wrists and ankles reminded him that he was chained like a criminal “κακοῦργος” literally meaning “evildoer”. Though he was chained, God's

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<sup>18</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (2 Ti 2:8). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>19</sup> Vincent, 2 Ti 2:8, Logos.

<sup>20</sup> Jeremiah 20:9

Word is not chained.<sup>21</sup> God would continue to use it through Timothy, and those to whom Timothy entrusted it.<sup>22</sup>

Paul's self-testimony continues with vs. 10 giving the reasoning behind Paul's willingness to undergo suffering, a reason strong enough that he impresses it upon Timothy. "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." It is for the sake of those whom God would call to salvation that he suffers, and if Timothy is called to suffer for the same sake, it is worth it. All this suffering however pales in comparison to the glory of resurrection awaiting everyone in Christ. Afflictions do not merely precede the glory; they help produce that glory.

This leads us to one of Paul's famous faithful sayings, or as the ESV translates, a trustworthy saying. Both words convey a faithful assurance in what follows: "If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself." The 'ifs' in this saying are not hypotheticals, but rather the 'if' of a fulfilled condition. The word 'because' would fit better. The aorist tense that is used proves this to be a past fact, not a present condition. It is with the faithful sayings of Paul that we glean a little more of who he was as a person. The reason he looked death so calmly in the face was because he already was dead. Because Jesus died as us, as well as for us, we will also live with him. Paul's identity was in the death of Jesus therefore he also identified with the risen Jesus. Paul had of course taught this to Timothy before but was giving him one last reminder that the believer has nothing to fear from death. All decisions should be influenced by the fact that death has been dealt its final blow by Christ.

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<sup>21</sup> Paul equated "my gospel" with "God's Word"(1 Thes. 2:13; 2 Thes. 3:1).

<sup>22</sup> Litfin, (2 Ti 2:9–10), Logos.

He suffered because he had his eyes on the reward, we will reign with Jesus. The Greek highlights the kind of reigning we will do implying an act of reign like a king. Paul was looking toward the day when he would be reigning with Jesus, and the man who was waging war against him, Emperor Nero, would be made a footstool for Christ's feet.

These verses also give us a look into the judgment day, and the attitude Christ will have when judging. Paul flips the coin on what he just said, the opposite of those who died and live with Christ and those who stay true to the end. He offers a warning and a promise, "if we deny him, he also will deny us" Rewards have to be earned. Faithfulness to Christ, our love for Him, are factors that will determine the rebukes and rewards that will be at the judgment seat.<sup>23</sup> Those who deny him will be denied their rewards at the throne of Jesus. This word does not refer to the loss of salvation; this refers to those who have been saved but wasted their life. According to Phillips, this denial relates to rewards, not salvation, and salvation is not the same as rewards at the throne.<sup>24</sup> Peter denied Jesus through vows and oaths and yet Christ restored him. This is also one of the verses that gets muddled up by the debate over the loss of salvation. The overarching theme throughout these verses though is one of endurance. And it is often used when the task of communicating the Gospel is in view.

The sad fact is that most believers are unfaithful, it's probable that "if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself" was a foreshadowing of his discussion on Demas in 4:10. This warning is different than the one above it, the tone has switched and it has within it the treachery of apostasy in view. This is the conscious decision to not endure and reject the call. In one swift move, Paul warns Timothy sternly and attacks the false teachers that Timothy was to fight the

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<sup>23</sup> Phillips, 376

<sup>24</sup> Phillips, 377

good fight against. It is the change of wording from denial to faithless that constitutes the severity and difference of interpretation per verse.<sup>25</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The life of a Christian, following and chasing after Christ, denying themselves on a daily basis is a life of entrusting and endurance. Paul has fought the fight, finished the race and is now calling Timothy to the same life. From Paul's experience the salvation found in Jesus remains the driving force for a life well lived. The completion of the Gospel spreading to the ends of the earth involves our response to faithfully endure what can only be deemed a struggle. The choice to fall away from it carries with it grave consequences both relationally with people and with God and eternally when having to face Christ on "that day" When entrusted with the Gospel, we must endure to the end.

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<sup>25</sup> Towner, 181

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