

# Qualities of a Faithful Christian Worker

## *A Study of 2 Timothy 2*

The letters known as 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus are sometimes called the Pastoral Epistles because they are written especially for teachers and leaders in the church. However, the instructions in these letters are not only for preachers, but for every Christian disciple, because the word “you” at the end of the epistle is plural. Paul concludes the letter by saying “Grace be with you” (2 Timothy 4:22)—referring to all the Christians at Ephesus.

We will use a seven-fold division to help explore the beauty and truth of this chapter. The Christian worker is to cultivate a number of qualities.

### **1. A Discipling Teacher (2:1-2)**

Timothy is told to “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2:1). There is a certain amount of hardship involved in being a worker in the Lord’s vineyard. Often there are irregular hours, sensitive problems, difficult personalities, and satanic deceptions. It is not easy to deal with some of the situations that arise in church.

It takes special strength many times to helpfully visit someone who is sick, to write a letter to someone who is discouraged, or to teach a Sunday School lesson to a class of squirming children. The message of verse 1 is “Be strong.”

We don’t have, in ourselves, all that it takes to do our spiritual duties. We must depend on the special strength that only God can give. Ephesians 4:7 is a wonderful promise: “But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” God promises to enable us for the task to which He has called us.

We are not merely to set our jaws, and grit our teeth, and determine to muster up all the human strength we can develop to do our work. Instead, we are to be inwardly strengthened by finding our resources in the grace of God. We find God’s grace by communicating with the heavenly Father. When we pray, we speak to God; when we read the Bible, God speaks to us. Regular habits of prayer and of Bible study are the primary sources of God’s grace.

In verse 2, Timothy is told that the message he had heard from the Apostle Paul is to be imparted to others, and they, in turn, shall teach it to still others. “The things that thou has heard from me . . . the same commit thou to faithful men” (2:2). The word “commit” means to “commission” or to “ordain.” Timothy was told to ordain men to communicate the Word of God—but he is to ordain only those who are faithful and utterly dedicated to their work.

Every father and mother should be discipling (teaching, nurturing) their sons and daughters in the things of God. Every grandparent should work at developing spiritual nurture in the hearts of their grandchildren, as they have opportunity.

## **2. A Courageous Soldier (2:3-4)**

God says to the young Christian worker, “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 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” (2:3-4).

The word translated “soldier” means “a soldier in battle, one serving on active duty.” The soldier out on the battlefield endures a rigorous life. He cannot enjoy a life of ease; he must be ready to do what the commander orders. Just so, the Christian worker must not become unduly entangled with the affairs of this world. The Greek word translated “entangled” means “to get wrapped in a net that leads to destruction.”

A true soldier must eliminate some competing interests in order to more effectively serve his commanding officer. The dedicated Christian worker must do likewise. This may include eliminating lots of time with a daily newspaper, laying aside the pleasure of owning a boat at the lake, or working at a time-consuming hobby.

Christian workers do not always have it easy. Sometimes they must be out in bad weather. It would be much easier to stay at home instead of attending a meeting, or going out to visit someone who is sick, or driving 50 miles to speak at a special service on Wednesday night. The early Methodist circuit-riding preachers knew what inconvenience and hardship were. They encountered savage Indians, raging rivers, and unknown dangers of many kinds. In those days, there was a proverb. If the weather was bad, the people would say, “The weather isn’t fit for man or beast; there’s nothing stirring out there except crows and Methodist preachers.”

We are to “endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2:3). The soldier illustrates rigid discipline and courage to stand firmly against the enemy.

## **3. A Law-Abiding Athlete (2:5)**

Second Timothy 2:5 says that if a man strives for masteries, “he is not crowned, except he strive lawfully.” The text is speaking of athletic events, and more literally says, “If anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor’s crown unless he competes according to the rules” (NIV).

Every game has its rules. Regardless of how competent athletes may be, unless they adhere to the rules of the game, they will be disqualified. Spiritual warfare has rules too! Our heavenly Coach expects us to keep the great spiritual laws laid down in the Bible.

*One basic law of Christian warfare is love.* This law should keep church members from clobbering each other with ugly criticism and hateful words, and with suspicions about the motives of others. A baseball player in athletic contests would soon be eliminated if he used his bat on fellow players instead of on the ball.

*Another basic law in the Christian warfare is persistence.* This law should keep Christian servants from giving up when things don’t go the way we think they should go. In Old Testament times, when Daniel

first requested a diet of vegetables (instead of the king's rich foods), his request was not granted. But he didn't give up, and when he suggested a 10-day trial period, the officer agreed to give it a try.

God's servants should be like an athlete. They must observe the rules of the game, and they must be willing to train rigorously to excel. Players on high school football fields, in the fall of the year, put all that they have into rigorous training. Sports enthusiasts work hard to develop skills in various areas—throwing a ball into a basket, sliding down a snow-covered slope on two sticks of wood, and chasing a little white ball all over a big green field. Just so, the life of every Christian worker should be one strenuous endeavor to live out the Christian faith during each moment of every day.

#### **4. A Hard-Working Farmer (2:6)**

In 2 Timothy 2:6 we read about the “husbandman” (Old English for “farmer”), who works hard to raise a crop. The text says that the hard-working farmer should be a “partaker of the fruits.”

The farmer toils for many hours. Sometimes he is confronted with poor soil, with bad weather, and with uncertain markets. The life of a farmer is not generally an easy life.

The farmer must plow his fields and sow the seed and cultivate the ground. Often, he must work, not by the clock, but when the job needs to be done. Sometimes he gets up before sunrise, and works long after dark in order to get the job done before a change in the weather. The hard-working farmer deserves a share of the crops as part of his reward (2:6).

One who serves Christ, like the farmer, must sow the seed of the Word of God. The Christian worker must establish friendships, plant the seed of God's Word, cultivate the soil, and then he must wait patiently. When the farmer has done his part, he must sit back and wait for the rains, and let the powers of nature produce fruit. More than any other workman, the farmer soon learns that there are no quick results. He must not keep digging up the seed to see if it has sprouted. The weeping sower (Psalm 126:6) shall someday bring a harvest of souls, with rejoicing. He must keep on patiently sowing.

The harvest of souls might include members of your own family, or perhaps a neighbor—or maybe a friend you met along the way. The Apostle Paul says that we are to seriously meditate on these things (2:7).

In 2 Timothy 2:8-13, there is a parenthesis—a section in which we are told *to be ready to suffer* for the cause of Christ. We are to remember how Jesus suffered many injustices (2:8-9), and how Paul was stoned and shipwrecked and lashed with a whip (2:10). The promise in 2:11-13 is that if we own Jesus Christ as Savior, He will own us (claim us for His own). If we develop a settled state of refusing to believe in Christ, then He will deny (disown, abandon) us (2:12). The statement in verse 13 promises that God will never go back on His word. He will stick by the pledges He has made—whether it be a pledge to reward the faithful, or a pledge to condemn the sinner.

## 5. A Diligent Workman (2:14-18)

The Christian worker is warned not to become preoccupied with side issues. Timothy is to charge others not to strive “about words to no profit . . . subverting the hearers” (2:14). Life is too brief and too busy to waste the brain on a lot of insignificant issues. Questions like “How many angels can stand on the head of a pin?” or “Was Jesus born on December 25?”—are a waste of time and cause people to become “theological cranks.” God has not seen fit to fully answer these questions, and when God is silent about an issue, we do well not to trouble ourselves concerning it!

Instead of dwelling on sideline issues, we are to study to show ourselves “approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2:15). God approves the person who works hard at the study of the Bible.

The “workman” is one who does more than casually read the Scriptures. To “study” requires time, concentration, research, seeking practical applications, and comparing scripture with scripture. To “divide” the Scriptures is to analyze the parts in light of the message of the whole book. To “rightly” divide the Scriptures is to avoid distorting and perverting the message.

To “study” the Bible requires some good tools—a Bible *handbook* which summarizes each chapter; a Bible *dictionary* which has a wealth of information about people, places, and things; and a Bible *concordance* which enables the user to find a verse when only a part of it is known. The student will develop the habit of carrying a Bible with him—reading it during the lunch break at work, studying it for a brief time each morning, and memorizing portions while traveling in an automobile, train, or plane.

Paul warns again (2:16) about getting caught up discussing insignificant questions that use a lot of time and are not really edifying. Such empty talk is like a cancer and does much harm. The false teachings of men like Hymenaeus and Philetus are examples of such poisonous infection. These men had misinterpreted the Bible, and injected their own theories about the resurrection. Their teaching did a tremendous amount of damage to the faith of some believers.

## 6. A Sanctified Vessel (2:19-22)

The main theme of the next few verses is that God’s truth is most effectively conveyed through clean vessels. We are to “depart from iniquity” (2:19).

To illustrate the importance of living an upright life, Paul speaks of the kinds of dishes and utensils found in the home of a wealthy person. He says that “in a great house, there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth . . . if a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use” (2:20-21).

The “great house” means a large house. Some of the utensils would be very costly, and prized highly because they are made of gold and silver. The cheaper utensils are made of wood and clay, and are used for taking out the garbage. The point is—that both the valuable dishes and the ordinary dishes need to be kept clean. Just so, the servant’s life must be clean.

God's servants must be persons of highest moral standards. They must guard against sexual impurity, compromising with wrong, and indulgence in questionable practices. God said to the temple servants in Old Testament times, "Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord" (Isaiah 52:11). God's truth is most effectively conveyed in clean vessels.

The thought is carried further in 2:22. We are instructed to "flee youthful lusts," and to "follow righteousness, faith, charity, and peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

What are some of the youthful lusts?

1) Impatience—Watch the line in a school cafeteria if someone tries to break into the line. Or, take a long trip with your children, and notice how soon they say, "Dad, when are we going to get there?"

2) Love of dispute—There is always a crowd when two or more get into a fight on the school ground. Children and youth seem to get a charge out of watching others scratch and claw each other or get bloody noses.

3) Living for the moment—Life is rosy, death seems far away, and there is a tendency not to take the eternal future into serious consideration.

4) Sexual impurity—Impurity is a common sin, because the passions are especially strong in youth, and the hormones are raging. Many parents are too embarrassed to give wholesome instructions about God's standards for sexual purity.

Instead of following youthful lusts, we are to "follow after" the qualities mentioned in verse 22:

1) Righteousness—Speaks of the kind of living that is right in the eyes of God. Our dealings should be marked by honesty, justice, and fairness.

2) Faith—Refers to a sincere trust in the promises of God's Word, sincerely believing that they are true.

3) Love—Defines the quality that seeks the welfare of others.

4) Peace—Speaks of the tranquility that allows us to live without worry and strife.

These have been virtues that should be cultivated in the lives of Christian workers.

### **7. A Gentle Servant (2:23-26)**

There is another reminder not to get caught up in marginal issues and in insignificant discussions (2:23). That reminder is followed by an admonition to be "gentle unto all men" and to teach those who oppose the instructor in a spirit of meekness (2:24-25). God might use the meek attitude of the Christian worker to help open the hearts of unbelievers, and bring them to repentance (2:25).

The Christian worker must be like a surgeon, not like a butcher. They both use knives, but they use their knives differently. The butcher slashed boldly and rapidly with a long, sharp knife to dismember the carcass. The surgeon cleans his hands, puts on his gloves, studies the patient carefully, and cuts gently

and accurately. The Word of God is like a knife (Hebrews 4:12), and so God's servant must proceed with care, so that he does not destroy what he is trying to heal. The purpose of our ministry is to seek to bring people to faith in Christ, not to shock them or cut them up or turn them off.

The servant of God can only go so far in seeking to help deliver someone out of the snare of the devil. The person caught up in Satan's trap must himself see his error, and sincerely want to be helped—and then he must do all within his power to overcome wrong. People who have become enslaved by alcohol, lust, dope, false teaching, gambling, adultery, and homosexuality—can never successfully be delivered unless they desperately want deliverance, and are willing to put forth every effort themselves—that they might “recover themselves out of the snare of the devil” (2:26). The Christian worker can initiate the concern, and the Lord will provide a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13), but the individual must want to be helped before there can be deliverance.

The entire life of each Christian worker should be one strenuous endeavor to live out a biblical faith during each moment of every day. There will be times when we will feel like dropping our training. Sometimes the easy way will seem more attractive. Sometimes the right thing will seem like the hard thing. Sometimes there will be a temptation to relax standards. But when we think we cannot keep going any longer, we must resolve to keep going for another ten minutes, and then another thirty minutes, and then another day. We must never give up—never grow “weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Galatians 6:9).

Looking back over the chapter, we can picture a composite portrait of the ideal Christian worker. The servant of Christ is to be:

- 1) Utterly dedicated to his work
- 2) Accurate and clear in his teaching
- 3) Upright in his character and conduct
- 4) Courteous and gentle in his manner

These are the responsibilities of those who labor and suffer for the sake of the Gospel. Verse 1 of Second Timothy 2 reminds us to “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”

-Harold S. Martin

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#### **BIBLE HELPS**

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