

Abiding Fruit

Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart

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He Cannot Deny Himself 2 Timothy 2:11 - 13

The Apostle Paul is near the end of his life. A cursory reading of 2 Timothy indicates that he had serious things on his mind as he wrote to Timothy. He is in prison and in chains (1:16). He refers to himself as the Lord's prisoner (1:8) which indicates how he regarded his suffering and afflictions. Timothy is in Ephesus, that great ancient commercial, political and religious city. It is from his prison cell in Rome, that Paul now directs his thoughts to his greatest protégé laboring for Christ in that Asian city where he himself had spent some 2 years, preaching and teaching the Gospel every day. As he thinks of Timothy, his thoughts are governed by Jesus and His Gospel. It is Christ who compels him onward (2 Cor. 5:14).

The verses before us lie in the context of Paul's instructions and exhortations to Timothy to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ. This kind of life involves being faithful in teaching (as Paul, as an example was), in suffering, and in discipline (2:1 – 7). In these areas, Timothy was to be an example. He was to pay attention to Paul's words, and the Lord would give him understanding (vs. 7).

Paul's next line of reasoning was to direct Timothy's attention to the Lord Jesus Christ in the sense of recalling to mind what He had done. Paul tells Timothy to remember the Lord as risen from the dead, as a descendent of David, and as the content of the Gospel that Paul always preached (2:8). In other words, Timothy must continually focus on the Resurrection of Jesus. He must remember that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies as Messiah (the offspring of David), and was therefore the King. He must remember that in order to achieve resurrection, there has to be a death, so Timothy was to make sure that the Gospel that he preached was one that proclaimed a substitutionary atonement for sinners. Paul encourages Timothy not to be afraid of suffering. Paul was suffering for the Gospel's sake (bound in chains as a criminal – see vs. 9). Suffering and imprisonment were completely insufficient to stop the Word of God from accomplishing its work (the Word of God is not bound – see vs. 9). It was because the Word of God is not limited in its power and scope that Paul willingly endured suffering and all kinds of afflictions (see 2 Cor. 12:9, 10).

Verse 10 is one the great verses in the Bible. Why did Paul do what he did and live how he lived? The answer is found in verse 10. Paul says that he was willing to endure all things for the sake of the elect, so that they could also obtain the salvation that both he and Timothy enjoyed and had received. Paul knows that the salvation of God's elect is through the proclamation of the Word of God that is limitless in its efficacy to bring saving faith and repentance as applied by the Holy Spirit. The only way the elect (whom Paul does not know) will hear the Gospel and respond to it, is through the preaching of the Word of God (see Rom. 10:14 – 17). Paul also knows that this response is prompted and brought to fruition by the Holy Spirit alone and is not a work of the natural man (see John 1:12, 13; 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 5:11 – 21; Eph. 2:1 – 8; James 1:18). All Paul has to do is preach the Word as does Timothy. In order for the elect to be saved Paul must preach. This is why he says he is willing to endure all things for the elect's sake (see 2 Cor. 11:23 – 33).

This salvation that Paul preaches is *"in Christ Jesus with eternal glory"* (vs. 10). It is a glorious eternal salvation accomplished through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. God's eternal purpose is to save sinners and thus bring glory to Himself (see Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:11; 3:11). There is no salvation anywhere

that does not bring glory to God through Christ. Salvation is God's glorious work accomplished by His sovereign will and power for the good of the sinner (soon to be saint) and the glory of God. Everything God does that is related to salvation (is there anything that God does that is not related to his covenant people – except their destruction?) is according to the eternal purpose and counsel of His own will. This is why salvation is of the Lord and not of man (see Jonah 2:9).

Timothy was to preach this Gospel with confidence and boldness. He was not to let suffering and hardships hinder him, and if he needed any encouragement (which he did) then he should look to Paul. It is in the light of verse 10 that Paul declares verses 11 – 13. Verse 11 begins with an introductory statement or formula often found in the Pastoral Epistles (see 1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; Titus 3:8). This formula serves to introduce a quotation and Paul's quotation is stated in the form of four thoughts linked together. Two of them are positive and two of them are negative.

The first two statements are positive. (1) If we died with Christ – we shall also live with Him; and (2) if we endure, we will also reign with him. The first statement in verse 11, points to the reality of salvation. I think it is right to connect the death expressed in this verse as referring to our union with Christ which Paul calls a baptism in Romans 6. I do not think this is a reference to water baptism as some see Romans 6. Paul is thinking of salvation which promises life after death. This salvation is in Christ, and so, all who are in Jesus shall never die (spiritually), but shall enjoy eternal life with Christ who died for them. This makes perfect sense when you connect it with why Paul endures all things for the elect's sake (so that they may be *saved*). Our dying is our union with Christ in salvation and our death to our sins.

Secondly, in verse 12a, it is logical to make the connection that those who are actually united to Jesus in salvation shall endure (all things – vs. 10). Paul's statements are designed to encourage Timothy in the face of hardship and suffering. Paul is saying to Timothy that if he has come to Christ, then Christ will ensure that he continues (endures), and in light of this Timothy must endure hardship as a good soldier. Faithful endurance is rewarded with reigning with Christ in the future. This is a promise to be steadfast since Christ will reward us in the future. (Notice the four "we's" in verses 11 and 12a).

The second set of statements are from the negative perspective (see vv. 12b and 13 – notice now the "we" and "he" formula). Loyalty to Jesus brings reward, but disloyalty brings certain ramifications (see 1 Tim. 5:8; also Matt. 10:33; 25:12; 26:72). Verse 12b offers an expected conclusion, but verse 13 has surprise for us. We would expect that if we denied Jesus, that He would be right to deny us. To disown Jesus is to be faithless (vs. 13). It does not make logical sense to do with verse 13 what we did with vs. 12b, because if we are faithless, Christ cannot be faithless in return. We must say that to be faithless cannot mean here to be unbelieving as if Christ can be unbelieving, but rather is connected with disloyalty to Christ. Faithfulness in Christ means that He carries out both His threats and His promises, and the faithfulness of Jesus (He cannot deny Himself) is the very encouragement that the Christian needs (see 1 Cor. 1:9; 10:13; 2 Cor. 1:18; Phil. 1:6; 1 Thess. 5:24; 2 Thess. 3:3; Heb. 10:23). Verse 13 is an earnest warning to us to be loyal to Christ. This is what Paul is stressing to Timothy. Admonition is designed to lead to positive response.

Dying with Christ leads to enduring for Christ in the present, and leads to living and reigning with Christ in the future. Denying Christ and being faithless to him in the present will lead to being disowned in the future because Christ is faithful. He cannot deny Himself. He must keep His word (both promises and threats) otherwise He would not be the Truth. Paul's masterful and careful admonition to Timothy is stated in such a way to keep Timothy faithful. Just as Christ is faithful to fulfill His threats, so too is He faithful to fulfill His promises. He can never deny Himself. He is God the Son. If Timothy could trust this faithful Savior and be encouraged to press on, which is what Paul wanted, so too can we, because Jesus can never deny himself – He is faithful.