

# A Call to Endurance, Part II

by David Roper

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*The sermon emphasizes the call to endurance in the Christian life, highlighting the importance of being a good workman and an undefiled vessel in order to rightly handle the word of truth and be a faithful servant of God.*

**Duration:** 35:23

**Scripture:** Proverbs 3:5, 2 Timothy 2:15

**Topics:** "Endurance"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the second chapter of Second Timothy. He discusses three metaphors that the apostle Paul uses to describe the faithful man of God: a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer. These metaphors emphasize the importance of endurance and diligent effort in the Christian ministry. The speaker then applies these metaphors to Timothy, encouraging him to be strong in the grace of Christ Jesus and to continue in his faith despite opposition and adversity. Additionally, the speaker introduces three more figures that describe the faithful man of God: an unashamed workman, an undefiled vessel, and an inoffensive servant. These figures highlight the importance of handling the word of truth correctly, maintaining purity, and serving with gentleness and mercy.

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## Transcript

Let's turn to the second chapter of 2 Timothy again. We'll do our best to try to finish the chapter this morning. Originally, I had planned to take a chapter a week, and it just didn't work out that way.

I think I'm going to have to leave the fourth chapter for you to work on on your own. But we'll get through chapter two today, and then through chapter three next week, and through a portion of chapter four, hopefully. That's our goal.

As you remember, in the opening paragraph of chapter two, we saw these three metaphors, figures of speech, that the Apostle Paul uses to describe the faithful men of God. He is, first of all, to be like a soldier, like a dedicated soldier, who pours out his life and service to his commanding officer. He endures hardship, and thus gains the approval of his commander.

He is, secondly, in verse five, to be like a law-abiding athlete, a law-abiding athlete, who observes the rules of the game in order to secure the prize. And third, in verse six, he is to be like a hard-working farmer, who must toil in order to participate in the harvest. There is a common denominator among these three metaphors.

It's that of endurance, that the faithful men of God, despite opposition, despite adversity and fatigue, they will persist and ultimately gain the reward. And then he applies these metaphors to Timothy. Timothy, who is timid, weak, flagging in faith, waning in enthusiasm for the Christian ministry.

Paul encourages him on to continuance. There is no approval, Paul says, without diligent effort. There is no crown without discipline.

There is no harvest without labor. He is to be strong. But again, not strong in himself, because Timothy did not have what was necessary to be strong in himself.

He is to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. In the remaining section of this chapter, in the next paragraph, starting with verse 14, Paul adds to his description of the faithful men of God by using three additional figures. That of an unashamed workman, in verse 15.

That of an undefiled vessel, in verse 21. And finally, an inoffensive servant, in verse 24. Let's look at these in detail.

First, the unashamed workmen, in verses 14 through 19. Remind them of this, and charge them before the Lord to avoid disputing about words which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

Avoid such godless chatter, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will eat its way like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have sworn from the truth by holding that the resurrection is past already. They are upsetting the faith of some, but God's firm foundation stands bearing this seal.

The Lord knows those who are his, and let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity. Now, there are two types of workmen envisaged in this paragraph. There is the workman who is approved of God, and therefore has no reason to be ashamed.

And there is the workman who is disapproved, and who ought to be ashamed. The difference between the two workmen is crystal clear, summed up in two verses, verses 15 and 18. The good workman, and he's good because he's approved by God, is one who rightly handles the word of truth.

The bad workman, who has forfeited God's approval, is one who has swerved from the truth, and therefore has every reason to be ashamed. Let's look at this in detail. A good soldier is one who rightly handles the word of truth.

This is variously translated in different versions. If you have a King James translation, it reads, he's one who rightly divides the truth. J.B. Phillips, in his translation, says he is one who uses the word of God to the best advantage.

Ken Taylor, in *Living Letters*, writes, one who knows what the Bible says and means. The Greek verb literally means one who cuts straight. It's used in other literature of stone cutters who cut a straight line through a stone.

It's used of woodcutters in a forest who are clearing a path. They cut a straight path through a forest. It's used of farmers who plow a straight furrow.

A good workman is one who cuts a straight path. It's one who has a goal in mind and who heads straight for that goal. He's not sidetracked.

He's not detoured. There was a translation of the Old Testament that Jesus used called the Septuagint. It was a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament scriptures.

And in that translation, in the familiar verse in Proverbs 3, 5, and 6, they use this verb. I think it's the only other place that it occurs in the scriptures. You're familiar with the passage.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him and he will literally cut your path straight. He will direct you straight to the goal.

And one who handles the word of truth or right is one who directs men to the goal. Now, what is the goal of which the scriptures speak? There's no question about that. In the scriptures, the goal is God-likeness.

Godly men and women is what God is after. He wants to produce in our lives the character of Jesus Christ himself. And the scriptures are the tool given by God to produce that quality of life in us.

So, a good workman will use the word of God to point people toward that goal, the goal of God-likeness. And there's a great call for this today. Young people today see so much hypocrisy among believers.

And the call is one to God-likeness so they may see in our lives the character of Jesus Christ himself. There's a story making the rounds these days. And it's funny, but it cuts deeply.

It has to do with a truck driver who stopped up on Cloud 9 on the top of Highway 17 for a bite to eat one day. And he got out of his truck and walked into the place, the eating place, and he ordered a steak sandwich and a cup of coffee and a piece of pie. And just as they delivered it, two hell's angels drove up in their motorcycles and parked them right outside the door.

And because there wasn't any room at the counter where he was eating for them to sit together, one sat on one side and one sat on the other. And they were evidently annoyed because he didn't move over, because one reached over and took his steak sandwich and began to eat it. The man just looked at the angel, didn't say a word.

And as he was turned to his right, the one on his left took his piece of pie and began to eat that. No comment. He smiled at the two men, rose from his seat, paid his bill, got in his truck and drove off.

One angel said to the other, that's a remarkable man. He must be a Christian. That's the way Christians act.

The other one said, well, if he's a Christian, he's certainly a good one. About that time, the first angel turned around and looked out the window, and he saw the man drive his truck away, and he commented to the other fellow, he may be a good Christian, but he's sure a poor truck driver. He just ran over our bikes.

See, what God is after is consistency, a God-like life, and every area of influence. And the Word of God is given to us to produce that character, that quality of life. Paul says in Philippians 3.13, This one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

And in the context, that goal is Christ-likeness. Paul says just prior to this, that I may know him, and the fellowship of his sufferings being made conformable unto his death. So then the goal of all personal Bible study and Bible exposition is that we may be God-like.

The Scriptures are the means to that end. In the third chapter, we'll look at this briefly next Sunday, but in the 15th verse, Paul says to Timothy, that from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

It's the means by which the man of God is comprehensively equipped for the service of Jesus Christ. It's not intended to be an object for speculation. It's not to feed our intellectual curiosity.

It's to bring us into relationship with God and nurture and sustain that relationship. So when we engage in personal Bible study or we expound the Scriptures to that end, we are good workmen. We have no reason to be ashamed.

On the other hand, Paul says that the disapproved workman is one who swerves from the truth. In verse 18, he cites two examples to teachers in the assembly, perhaps at Ephesus, and he mentions them as an illustration of those who have literally missed the mark. They're like a bowman who draws an arrow at a target and shoots wide of the mark because they aim wide of the mark.

They miss the mark because they do not put the Scriptures to their intended purpose. They use it as a basis for speculation. It says they dispute about words in verse 14.

They engage in godless chatter. They argue and debate about its meaning, but they never place themselves under its authority. They never submit to it.

They have no intention of obeying it. And so consequently, they miss the mark. They're like basketball players who pass the ball around, but they never take a shot.

They're constantly engaged in interpretation, but they never apply the truth. Therefore, Paul says they are disapproved workmen who ought to be ashamed. There was a school of thought that was troubling the church at the time Paul wrote this letter.

It was called Gnosticism. It was a system of philosophy that produced a lot of unpronounceably long words and fantastic theories. It evidently found its way into the early church and in their method of Bible study.

They attempted to make the Christian life a complex philosophical theory rather than an adventure of faith. And thus they were robbing Christian faith of its simplicity. And I think perhaps this is what Paul is concerned about as he addresses these words to Timothy.

Timothy, don't mishandle the word of truth. Don't make it an object of speculation, but use it as an instrument to instruct and correct and encourage men toward godliness. I think that perhaps Timothy was facing the same problem that Jesus himself faced in his conflict with the Pharisees.

These were men who were students of the Scripture. They scrutinized it minutely. In fact, that became their problem.

They became preoccupied with minutia. They accounted all the letters in the Old Testament. They knew what was the middle letter of the Scriptures.

They knew where every form of every type of verb could be found, the number of occurrences of these verbs. But they never applied the truth to themselves. And so they missed the whole point of the Old Testament, which was to lead people to faith in Messiah.

But when Jesus came, he said to them, You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you find eternal life, but they are they which testify of me, and you will not come to me that you may have life. They were not good workmen, and so they missed the mark. Now, the mark of a good workman, as we've said, is that he handles the word of truth properly.

His personal study will draw him closer to the Lord because he is confident of its authority. He doesn't dicker with it. He doesn't quibble about it.

He believes it. He obeys it. He responds to it.

And his teaching of others is clear and decisive. He doesn't hesitate to proclaim its authority, and he attempts to make its truth understandable to all who hear it. He keeps his exposition simple so that it is readily understood and obeyed.

On the other hand, the disapproved workmen will leave men befogged and confused about God. Paul says they will ruin their hearers, and they will lead people into more and more ungodliness. There is progress in reverse.

The more they teach, the less people know. The result of their teaching is utter confusion. I heard a story recently about Professor Paul Tillich, formerly of the University of Chicago.

The story had to do with the appearance of several men before the gates of heaven. The archangel was standing by the gate. The first person to appear was the apostle Peter.

The angel asked Peter, Peter, who do you say that Jesus is? Peter said, in the words which he used before, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. To which the archangel responded, enter into his rest. A bit later, Professor Tillich came down the path.

Peter asked him, Dr. Tillich, who do you say Jesus is? His response was, Theologically, he is the ground of all being. Eschatologically, he is the ground of all hope. And existentially, he is the ground of the divine human encounter.

To which the angel said, huh? Confusion. He doesn't cut straight to the goal. It's not clear in his understanding of the word of God.

Not concise in his teaching. The result of instruction is not a more godly person, but a more confused person. Our Christian faith was never intended to be a system that boggles the mind.

Scriptures are designed to lead us into a relationship with God, and his plan is clear and explicit and intelligible. I'm not saying that the scriptures are without subtlety or artless, because as you know, the greatest minds of the past 2,000 years have wrestled with its ideas. But the way is clear.

There is no question about the basic plan for man's salvation. It is understandable. And therefore, a good workman will accept the validity of that plan, and will make it plain to others.

This then is the test that we have to apply to ourselves. If at the end of our own personal study of the scriptures and our exposition of scripture to others, we are closer to God, and we're closer to one another, and our lives are manifesting the character and the fragrance of Jesus Christ, then we have no need to be ashamed. On the other hand, if at the end of our study, we're farther away from God, we've erected barriers to him and barriers to one another, then we are disapproved workmen, and we have every reason to be ashamed.

Now, verse 19 is a word of encouragement to Timothy. God's firm foundation stands bearing this seal, the Lord knows those who are his. And let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.

Timothy, he says, the faith of some is being upset. But the foundation itself will never be upset. God himself will never be overthrown.

And the work that he's doing in lives will never be overthrown. Despite what may appear to be, God is at work. His foundation is firm, it stands.

Now, we use the word foundation in two ways, as men did during this time. We speak of one type of foundation as a base for a building. Another use is that of an association, something founded by someone like the Ford Foundation.

And I think it's this latter use that's in view here. What Paul is saying is that what God has founded is firm and secure. And, of course, what he has founded is the church of Jesus Christ, his body.

Not the institution, but the people, the believers, the work that God is doing in the lives of people. And as Jesus said, the gates of hell will never prevail against that church, not the authentic church of Jesus Christ. And it has, he says, these marks, these identifying marks, a two-fold seal.

One invisible, one visible. The Lord knows those who are his. And secondly, let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.

These are the marks of divine activity. As we proclaim the truth of the word of God, we will see God begin to draw men to himself. He works in this quiet, persistent way.

He comes to know them and to elicit a response from them. As men are drawn into a relationship with him, their lives change, and they begin to depart from iniquity. So, this is the two-fold seal.

God at work invisibly in the lives of men. And secondly, men responding to his call and their lives being changed and it being manifested in their life by a departure from iniquity. This is an encouragement, I'm sure, to Timothy and to us as well.

Many were departing from the faith, as we've indicated before. They were disregarding Timothy's message. And I'm sure that Timothy was tempted to mute his message, to tone it down, to try to accommodate himself to the climate of that day.

Paul says, no, you proclaim the gospel. It's inevitable that some will depart, they'll disregard it, but the foundation is secure. God will continue to work in this mysterious way in which he works, to draw men to himself and to change their lives.

But it only comes as we are fearless in our declaration of the truth. We don't try to protect ourselves or protect the truth, but we declare it. We expound it.

I was talking to Mark Pedersen this past week, and we were reflecting on our student ministries and the fact that so often students start well, but then fade after a time. The word just doesn't seem to take root. And the adversary can get us preoccupied with these young people who drop out.

It becomes a concern to us. But when we look at our ministries realistically, and in terms of this verse, we can see here and there and in dorms and in fraternities, in homes, other places, people that demonstrate the fact that the foundation is firm, that God is at work, that he's drawing men to himself, and people's lives are being changed. That's our confidence.

Now, if you're involved in a ministry and you're discouraged because people are not responding as you think they ought, remember God's firm foundation stands. And as Paul says in the book of Galatians, that we're not to be weary in well-doing, for in due season we will reap if we faint not. We just continue to declare the Word despite opposition, despite hostility, despite lack of response, young people and others who fall out.

It doesn't matter. We're to declare it. And by so doing, we demonstrate that we're a good workman, a workman who has no reason to be ashamed because we're handling aright the word of truth.

Now, there's a second figure that the apostle uses in verses 20 through 22. In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and earthenware, and some for noble use, some for ignoble. If anyone purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work.

So shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart. The second figure is that of a clean or an undefiled vessel. The picture is very clear, I think.

In an affluent household there are various types of utensils. There are some that are reserved for display or for entertainment, the gold and silver vessels. There are others that are designated for more menial use, the pottery and the stainless steel, here the wooden and earthenware.

And Paul says that the measure of the worth of those vessels is the degree to which they are clean. See, none of you ladies would serve a meal in the evening to your family off of plates that still had the breakfast eggs on them. They're not fit.

They're not suitable for that. So Paul says that if you want to be in a place of service and usefulness to God, then you must be a clean vessel. It's a very helpful suggestion here, if I can digress for just a minute.

He's not saying that gold and silver vessels are noble and wooden and earthen vessels are ignoble. That's not the point. He says that there are various levels of service for various types of responsibilities.

It's not the inherent quality of the vessel that qualifies it for work. It's the state of cleanliness of the vessel. That some have a ministry that is unnoticed, but if they're clean vessels, God is using them.

Others have a ministry that involves more display. They're more out front. But again, their qualification is the same.

Are they clean vessels? If you purify yourself from the things that defile you, Paul says, you will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the Master. What a statement. Useful to the Master.

That's our hunger. To be useful to Him. To be put to the service that He desires to put us to.

And the qualification is that we be clean. He applies then this metaphor to Timothy. Commands him to shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness.

He's not advising him to cut himself off from other people. He's only to deal with evil within himself and only to cut himself off from people in so far as they corrupt him and cause the evil within to be manifest. He sets two verbs in contrast.

He says, shun youthful passions negatively and then positively to aim at righteousness. The word shun means to flee, to run from danger. It suggests that sin is an enemy of our souls.

It will destroy us. And there are times when we will have to physically or mentally flee from temptation if we're to continue to be the instrument for service that God wants us to be. Just as Joseph had to flee from Potiphar's wife physically and leave her with an empty toga.

I just can't help when I think of that story contrasting it with the modern day story of the graduate. There's a young man who did not flee from temptation and therefore he became, as you sense, a useless vessel. But Paul says, shun these things, flee from them.

And in establishing your cleanliness, God will give you a place of service and he will use you. Now there are certain sins from which he was to flee. They're called youthful lusts, involves much more than sexual sins.

I'm sure they're the sins that uniquely characterize young people. The sins of impatience, of self-assertiveness, of the love of discussion but a failure to commit oneself to the truth. A contempt of tradition, an unwillingness to listen to others, an unteachable spirit.

These are all the faults essentially of idealism. And young people ought not to be rebuked but to be helped and encouraged as Paul is encouraging Timothy to turn from these things and aim positively at these attributes. Righteousness, that is a right relationship with God and men.

Faithfulness here, not so much faith, our attitude toward God, but our dependability, our trustworthiness, our willingness to be where we say we'll be, to do what we say we will do, to follow through with our word, to be reliable and faithful. And love, Paul says, aim at love. The determination to seek nothing less than the very best for others around us.

And to put away bitterness and a vengeful spirit and a violent heart. And finally, peace. That quiet assurance of fellowship with God and the quiet confidence that God is at work in the world.

The result is a life that is peaceful and that makes peace. Now all of these things, Paul says, are attributes that are sought in the company of those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart, that is a purified heart. Just two things briefly.

One, this is a heart that Jesus Christ has purified. And it's only as our hearts are brought into submission to him that he can purify us. And secondly, this is something that is done in the company of other believers.

It's one of these passages of scripture that speak of our need for relatedness with other believers. To be drawing upon one another, trusting others, leaning upon them. We cannot declare our independence from one another and expect to keep our heart purified.

There's a third figure in verses 23 through 26. Having nothing to do with stupid, senseless controversies, you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kindly to everyone.

An apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth and they may escape from the snare of the devil after having been captured by him to do his will. His final figure then is that of an unselfish or an inoffensive servant.

The vessel in the house becomes the servant in the household. Now Paul was not in this passage prohibiting controversy because there were times that Paul himself had to enter into controversy in order to declare the truth. What he's prohibiting is a love of controversy, a quarrelsome spirit.

This, he says, is forbidden. We're not to engage in stupid, senseless quarrels or arguments for argument's sake. But we're to be gentle.

See, it's not just what we say that's important as we declare the gospel. It's how we say what we say. We're to be kindly, gracious.

We're to be forbearing. We don't get resentful when people spurn the truth or when we ourselves face opposition or hostility. We don't get touchy.

Our feelings don't get hurt when we're rejected. We're gentle, not arrogant or brash. We melt the coldest heart with love.

We don't batter people into submission. We love them into submission to Jesus Christ. And Paul says that if we adorn the Christian message with this type of life, a life that displays Christian love, God may grant that they will be released.

It's an interesting little look, I think, behind the scenes of a Christian evangelistic ministry. Men are only the puppets on the stage. The real action takes place behind the stage.

There's a battle between God and Satan. Certain men have been ensnared by the devil to accomplish his will. And God will grant release to them.

He'll set them free to do his will. But it seems to hinge upon our attitude. They will only repent if we are gentle.

You see, these are the figures that describe what a faithful man of God ought to be. He's like a hard-working soldier or athlete or farmer who endures hardness, no matter what the opposition may be, no matter how people may treat him. He expects, as a part of God's program for his life, that he will suffer, and that he must endure hardness.

He's like a skillful craftsman who has learned to use his tools and therefore has no reason to be ashamed of his work. He's like a household utensil, scrubbed clean, available to the master for his service. And he's like an unselfish servant who serves with gentleness and mercy, without resentment, without personal pique.

He gives himself in service to others. These beautiful figures are what a faithful man of God must be. If you like alliteration, we must be committed in our labor, confident in our skill, clean in our living, and courteous in our demeanor.

Shall we pray? Lord, this is our prayer this morning, that we may be men and women who are faithful and who manifest these attributes. We ask that we may learn, as good workmen, to use the Word of God aright. And that in our personal lives we may be obedient to the truth and thus be clean vessels that you can use.

And then that as your servant we may be selfless, inoffensive, offending people only because the message of the cross is offensive, not because our personalities offend them. This is our desire. And we realize that this life comes only through your life and that it is only as we are strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus that we can exhibit these characteristics.

Thank you for these truths. In Christ's name, Amen.

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