

Reading on 2 Timothy 1 and 2

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby's sermon on 2 Timothy emphasizes the importance of personal faith and courage amidst challenges in the church.

Topics: "Courage in Faith", "Endurance in Trials"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the personal and relational aspects of Paul's message to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1 and 2, highlighting the importance of maintaining courage and faith amidst the challenges and failures within the church. He draws parallels between Timothy and Jeremiah, stressing that even in times of decay, believers are called to stand firm and uphold the truth of the gospel. Darby points out that the spirit of power given by God enables Christians to confront the spirit of fear and to endure hardships for the sake of the elect. He also reflects on the significance of returning to foundational truths of faith, especially in light of the challenges faced by the church in contemporary times.

Transcript

It is very striking to see how Paul goes back and down to natural associations, and also the way in which he does so; he departs here from the fulness of the doctrine usual to him, and becomes both private and personal; "whom I serve from my forefathers," "thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice" - both Jewesses; he is occupied more with personal relationships than with dispensational thoughts. His service, he says, is with a pure conscience, just as when he was smitten on the face; Acts 23:1, 2. And we find here Timothy's gift was by the putting on of Paul's hands.

Ques. Do you confine that gift to teaching?

I do not know that it was, it might be ruling, too.

The seventh verse is important in these last days, when evil has so come in, and is rampant; when it would cavil and make the ruin of the church the occasion of self-will. In judging of things, there is a wisdom that will allow no air bubbles about divine things, but which judges by reality. There is nothing more insisted upon by the apostle than that, in the midst of religious failure, we are never to lose courage, "in nothing terrified by your adversaries," Phil. 1:28. Here, it is, that we are not to have "the spirit of fear," nor to be ashamed. Peter tells Christian women not to be "afraid with any amazement."

There is a distinct power of Satan in this world, but where he is met with confidence, he is a beaten enemy. God has given to us a spirit of power, not of fear.

A steady firmness should therefore mark us, for we know we have got hold of the truth and of the will of God, as to our position and path, while others are beating about uncertainly.

There is something analogous between Timothy and Jeremiah. Failure in the church has brought about the loss of power. God would not have withdrawn it. Suppose power had been given only by the laying on of the apostles' hands, when the apostles were gone, how then? But the point here is that when the power of evil is come in, that is just the time that Paul expects courage and not flinching, chap. 2:1. The evil was rising up, not merely from without, but from within the church, and everything was falling into a state of decay; but the close of the epistle shews how that, as regards Paul himself, the Lord stood with him.

318 Elijah's day was a time of special darkness, nevertheless there was the LORD'S special power. This is particularly applicable to the present moment. Latter times have since come in, and all that would exercise our faith the Lord has allowed to come in and do so.

Ques. Would you say that 2 Timothy gives us the particular resources of God to meet the uncommon difficulties that have arisen?

Yes. 1 Timothy gives the order of the Church; but here, we learn what to do when all is in disorder.

Ques. What is the difference between that which we find here, and the "fear and trembling" the apostle speaks of in Philippians 2:12?

That is what we have still to do as regards trusting in ourselves. A person who goes through trial with God, with fear and trembling as to self, will come out of it with power, as did our blessed Lord Himself in Gethsemane, and when He came out of the trial He was as quiet as could be. The great secret is to have the whole weight of a sorrow borne on your spirit before and with God, and then when the actual thing comes, it is over. You do go through it, in that case, but its pressing effect on the heart is gone. Our Lord said, "the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" and in spirit and heart He went through it in Gethsemane.

Ques. What is "the testimony of our Lord" (v. 8)?

Just the gospel for which Paul was in prison. His imprisonment was connected with the testimony to the Gentiles because of the jealousy of the Jews who said, "away with such a fellow from the earth!"

Ques. Why does he say, "I serve from my forefathers"?

It is as when a person is thrown back upon the elements of faith; there is a great deal carried on just now in the energy of the work, but which lasts only for a time, and then one has to go through things with a character of faith that reaches to the foundation of it all. That is what people mean when they say, 'you want one truth to die by.' You come back to that which is the basis of everything - the blood of Christ.

There is a great deal which one uses as the sword of the Spirit in carrying on a warfare, but it is a distinct thing when one has to come back to certain great leading truths.

319 Ques. Could the apostle be accused of neglecting what was properly Jewish and of God?

Not fairly so. Here, to Timothy, it was a personal reference. Paul was sorely wounded by the way in which some had turned away from him. The testimony of our Lord may include something more than the proclamation of the gospel, but it is that chiefly.

Ques. Does not Paul turn back to what is eternal as well as dispensational?

Yes.

Ques. Is there not in the first epistle a substratum of truth which remains when dispensational order is broken up?

We get there not so much truths that link souls with God, but the common ordering of the house of God. In the second epistle it is more human, what is wise amongst men rather than what is orderly. Timothy and Corinthians are different, though in Corinthians there is a coming down to human order. Even if the power of God was there with a tongue, the individual was not to speak if there were no one present to interpret, and that is a matter of human suitableness. In a sense, both Corinthians and Timothy are on human ground. So two or three were allowed to speak, and not more, though they were inspired.

It is not like a flood-tide of power carrying on the testimony to others; but when it is ebb-tide, the apostle exhorts those who stand in the ebb-tide to carry on all the same. We have personal piety here, and firmness and steadfastness. And in these last days people are thrown upon personal faith, much more so than ever they were. In verse 8, both the Lord's name and His servant's were in reproach, and here Paul brings in "the power of God." It was the same with Elijah in his extremity. Nobody was taken up to heaven in the palmy days of Solomon! Paul was a builder, and it was for him a strange thing to see the tide ebb, much more so than it was to John. Paul had built the church, yet, wise master-builder as he was, it was crumbling already.

Ques. Would there be anything of this in the letters to the seven churches?

Yes, in principle. Already at the start, things had been suffered to come in so that we might have, later on, inspired directions to know what to do. But the epistles to the seven churches are much more comprehensive. Here, in Timothy, we have the moral state, and how to hold on to certain principles; but there, in those epistles, we have the whole scene portrayed. In the normal state of things the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved; but here, He says, as it were, 'you cannot tell such at all, but I know them that are mine.' And we have the man of God perfect, and we learn how he is able to carry on by individual faithfulness, when there is nothing to sustain him in the corporate thing all around.

320 We find, therefore, in this epistle thorough instruction for these times - truth for the times indeed. There are truths for eternity, of course, which are more blessed in themselves, yet, just now, these are necessary.

Christianity was not of the world at all; when it was first brought out, God set everything on a totally different ground. Certain counsels and thoughts of God there were for the giving eternal life and glory through His own Son to those who should believe in Him, which existed before ever the earth was. All that was God's counsel; and He hath now saved us and called us, not according to our responsibility, but according to His own mercy; chap. 1:9. Well, here we have a system set up in God's mind before ever the world was, called eternal life in Titus 1:2 and chap. 3:7; and again, in Ephesians 1, we have, "chosen . . . in him before the foundation of the world." It is not merely a question of the election of the individual, but

that there was a grand plan and purpose which God had in His mind, and Christ comes to do His will, and accomplish that purpose, as I may say. But before Christ appears on the scene, the first man is set up, and there we have creation and responsibility, not purpose; it is on that ground that the first man stands.

Well, the first man fails and goes on in failure; then we get the law, and that, of course, is responsibility, too. The prophets call back to it and then Christ comes in connection with the question of responsibility, and as soon as this is solved by Him, the history of responsible man is finished. Then God's work of atonement is wrought, and His purpose, which had been hidden from ages and generations, comes out in the second Man. Christianity is what was before the world, and was hidden during the ages that rolled on their course, and in which the first man remained upon a footing altogether different from that of Christianity, for we find the church belongs not to this world, but to the heavens, and consequently hers is a heavenly calling.

321 Responsibility is unfolded in the history of the first man, and that responsibility closes in the cross, where it is proved that God can get no good out of man at all; each one of us has to learn this lesson. I learn that I am a sinner, that I cannot keep the law of God, and that I do not care for Christ. Looking at the ways and dealings of God, the probation of man, as man, was over at the cross, and since then God treats him as lost. A lost man is no longer under probation; he has been under it, but that is now a thing settled and past. God is now gathering together in one all things in Christ, and He begins with the church.

It is an exceedingly important thing to see that the responsibility of the creature, the authority of God, and the judgment of God in righteousness are all maintained. These questions had been raised in the garden of Eden. Promise came in afterwards to Abraham, promise without any condition at all. In the garden we have Adam and the two trees of life and responsibility; then the law takes up responsibility, and puts life after the accomplishment of it.

These two trees or principles can never be taken up and reconciled until we come to Christ. They are brought together again in Christ, and then we find that He has stood for us in circumstances of failed responsibility, and further that He has brought in life. Divine counsels can now come out which were there before the world existed.

Just see what has come out in the gospel of the glory! (chap. 1:9, 10). We now are in a new position of responsibility, for saints have to act up to the position they are in.

Whilst the law never went beyond the duty of man, the Christian's path goes on the ground of the likeness of God: "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children." All these truths coming out was, so to speak, like the flowing tide with the apostles. "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us."

Well now, instead of this, we see here that Paul has to get back to Timothy's grandmother Lois; the tide was going the other way. He was greatly pressed in spirit, no doubt, but still he says it will not do to give way. It may be there was even anxiety in his mind about Timothy himself, anyway he thought good to exhort him.

322 And this position is one which we have fairly to look in the face. God has brought out afresh this truth of the glory of the church, and simple minds see it to be so. One who recently came to a reading meeting from across the water, after listening a while, said, 'I see what it is plainly enough, Paul's testimony has been completely lost, and brought out again.'

First, I see Christ on the cross working redemption, next, on the Father's throne giving the Holy Ghost, and, lastly, as coming again. The result of the first, viz., justification by faith, was recovered at the Reformation; but Christ's sitting at the right hand of God and sending the Holy Ghost was then totally ignored; and the Lord's coming was wholly rejected as Jewish.

These two last truths it is that God has now brought out; that while Christ is sitting on the Father's throne, the Holy Ghost is down here, and is gathering out a people in connection with Christ, and to whom the Lord will come again and receive to Himself.

Meanwhile, our place is something like Nehemiah's; we have to carry the trowel in one hand and the sword in the other. We must have unfeigned faith, and we must have positive power, too; no truth is enough without its power, though, of course, these are connected.

One is often grieved that Christians around us do not get hold of that which God is bringing out; on the other hand, it is Satan's effort to hinder them, and to raise a cloud of dust and prejudice against it.

It is ours to endure now, knowing that that is the way of the tide. But then I believe it is a very blessed time, if in simplicity we keep our minds from being involved in a labyrinth of perplexity. There cannot be intelligent service unless we have before our eyes the truth of God about the church. In Ephesians, God's counsels are unfolded; but here, it is the enduring of all things for the elect's sake. Christ did the same; He endured all things for the elect's sake.

The two thoughts are found distinctly here; the counsels of God as characterising the position, and then, the enduring right through to the end. Therefore there must be more and more of individual faith, "unfeigned faith." The One whom he had believed remained always as an object before Paul. And he was suffering because he was carrying this out. Nevertheless, he knew whom he had believed. 'I have laid up all my happiness in Christ and He will keep it; it is all safe, and, when the day comes, I shall get it all; though everything is going against me here, Christ has my all in His safe keeping.' We see Paul enduring to the end, and not giving up the testimony in any way. He is not speaking of what Christ has committed to him, but of what he has committed to Christ. The truth he had received of the Lord, that he did commit to faithful men. This is to individuals in contrast to what was committed at first to the church. It is not, however, a question here of ordained men, nor is it that of office. "The sound words, which thou hast heard of me" were certain grand truths, including the mystery and the rapture, which he was to maintain and keep - a sort of outline of truth.

323 Ques. What does tradition mean?

Tradition simply means, a thing taught or communicated; it is tradition if you and I are merely talking now, we read of the "traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle." It was all tradition; and the way in which one or two scriptures are quoted on this point is only dishonest. To us the test of tradition is the written word. But tradition may be delivered from mouth to mouth, or by letter. As to mere words, 'Trinity' is a word not found in Scripture, although it is an expression of a truth found therein.

Ques. Would you speak of the Spirit as a Person?

I speak of His personality because in Scripture I have a Being that comes and goes, is sent, speaks, and hears, and so I say, He is a Person. And I would insist upon certain statements of truth, commonly accepted, that present truth in the way the saints of God admit. But if I find a person quarrelling much over

the words, I rather suspect it is because he does not like the thing itself. God is not the truth. He always tells the truth; but the truth is something that is told of another. Christ is the truth, for He is the One who tells others of God.

Things were in a terrible state, for all in Asia had turned away from Paul; he was glad to have one single person, Onesiphorus, that would own him; things had got down very low, and this at Ephesus where there had been so much blessing! Yet the apostle tells us that "the foundation of God standeth sure."

Ques. How did they turn away from Paul?

Why, they were ashamed of him; not only had they given up the truth that Paul specially taught, but they had also given him up, which might be more. Some were even ashamed of Paul's chain.

324 But it is very striking how he was cast back on elementary truth, indeed it must always be so.

"Thou, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace," etc. (chap. 2:1).

Ques. What is the force of, "entangleth himself"?

Well, if one has the energy of faith for it, sufficient to do both, one might make tents as well.

Ques. What does verse 6 mean?

The husbandman must labour before he gets the fruits; so with the soldier, or the athlete, or the husbandman, all must suffer first. One must be without encumbrance, one must strive lawfully, and one must work first. In verse 8, we have the two foundation elements, i.e., the Seed of promise, and the One who has met death, and has been raised up.

Ques. What is "my gospel"?

Just what Paul had been teaching. Judgment was part of his gospel; he connected it with the glad tidings, "in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel," Rom. 2:16.

Ques. What is the difference between "my gospel" and "my doctrine"?

There is a great deal of teaching that is not exactly gospel, though the gospel is included in the teaching. See 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. Certain things there were that Paul taught in common with Peter, but in other things this was not so. I believe that God has brought out the truth we are contending for, but along with it there is the testimony of Paul that the professing church of God on the earth is a total failure. It has gone back to Judaising system, and is dragging people back to it as well. If you examine any writings, outside of the Scriptures, you will not only find the truth of the church lost, but also that the truths of redemption, and justification by faith are totally gone. I do not think you will find in any of the writings of the so-called Fathers, from Polycarp and Ignatius downwards, these two truths maintained. While there is faith in the Person of the Christ, and truths by which the thing is applied to men, yet you will not find redemption and justification in any one of the Fathers. They never had sound faith as to the reconciliation of souls to God by faith in Christ's blood - not one of them.

325 Ques. Do you think that during that time individual souls had peace with God?

Oh, yes; they were attached to the Person of Christ in an unintelligent way, and they suffered martyrdom for His sake. Justin Martyr denies the full personal divinity of Christ. Presently they got praying for the saints after they were dead. Origen held that all souls existed before, and that the fall of man was just his coming down into a body, and he was the most learned Father of the Church. Clement, too, did not hold the divinity of Christ. It was the Platonic philosophy that corrupted the doctrine. Origen was the teacher of a school of doctrine. Hermas says the Holy Ghost was God's Son, and took counsel with God what he should do, and he did more than God set him to do, and therefore God gave him a great reward. It was lately ascertained that Hermas was the brother of Pius I, and not an apostolic Father at all.

Ques. What about their praying to saints?

That came in late; the first thing was, they prayed for them. The archbishop of Lyons wrote Pope Innocent to know how it was the mass was so changed. If you get Gregory's Sacramentaria, you will find prayers for the saints in them. Christ was the only one they did not pray for; they prayed even for the Virgin Mary.

The archbishop's letter was written in or about the eighth or ninth century. The word of God was, of course, entirely given up, save as they sometimes appealed to it, when they got into conflict. Epiphanius in the fourth century says you cannot pray for Christ because He is in glory.

The sense of the Holy Ghost being here was very soon lost. What they found of the privileges of the body of Christ they applied to the external professing body, and decided that even if heretics were baptised they got the Holy Ghost. All very dismal work! Paul writes: "If we have died together with him, we shall also live together." I do not doubt the actual thing was before his eyes. "If we deny him," etc. Here we have no ecclesiastical doctrine at all. I believe that if a man does deny Christ, Christ will deny that man. I do not mean like Peter, but one who persistently denies Christ.

Ques. How could saying the resurrection was past, overthrow the faith of some?

That is what we learn from verse 18. When people object to 2 John 10, 11, they are trying their best to excuse evil or to let it in. It was the vigilant eye of the apostle that detected that the faith of some was overthrown. Annihilation seems plausible, because God is merciful, but I find personal atonement is thereby gone, and I set my face against it like a flint. I find also this, that I must be purged from the vessels to dishonour. Do you profess Christ? Then you must depart from iniquity.

326 In verse 19, we have the Lord's certainty in divine knowledge, and our own responsibility. In verse 22, we get an additional thing which was not in the beginning of the gospel at all, viz., "out of a pure heart." There is nothing of that in the Acts, a man was not examined at all then. Calling on the name of the Lord is the distinction of a Christian.

Ques. How far would this refer to a person judging the system he may be in?

Well, if he has not a bad conscience about what he is in, he cannot judge it. I remember in France, someone coming to break bread one Lord's Day morning, because he wanted, he said, to prove that he could break bread with the worst kind of Christians that he knew. He was refused, as it was rightly thought that he was not acting upon the principle of godliness.

Ques. What is a "pure heart"?

One that has nothing consciously in it that is inconsistent with Christ. Remember, though, that Paul says: "I am conscious of nothing in myself; but I am not justified by this."* You cannot take the consciousness of the individual as a rule and measure for the church.

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