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Weak-Kneed Believers: Surveying 2 Timothy



In his second epistle to Timothy, Paul shares many of his lamentations about making disciples. As we will see from our overview of this epistle, real disciple making is never accomplished apart from the trials of persecution. Another way of saying this is, we don't know if we are loyal followers of Christ (legitimate, mature believers) until we respond faithfully to persecution.

Persecution is a necessary ingredient in making disciples, even though few want to acknowledge that affliction is in the mix. But persecution is the ultimate test of our mettle. A weak-kneed believer will fail under this test. Only when there is a cost to our faith—when God allows us to be tested—do we learn our true level of spiritual maturity, our level of faithfulness.

Read on, my friend!

Ralph Drollinger

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✓ MINISTRY ENDORSEMENT

Vicki Strong

Vermont State Representative
Orleans-Caledonia District 1



“I appreciate that being a part Capitol Ministries allows us to be a part of what is going on in other parts of the country and the world. Vermont is small and very secular and has very little church attendance. The Christian light is not shining here very brightly, so, to be as part of Capitol Ministries whose light is shining bright across the country and the world is a blessing and gives me a lot of strength to be a legislator and a Christian in this environment.”

— REP. VICKI STRONG

Rep. Strong is the sponsor of the weekly Capitol Ministries Bible study to legislators in the state capitol that is led by Ministry Leader Pastor Rosaire Bisson.

I. INTRODUCTION

Peter initially denied Christ when there was a cost to his commitment. But later he responded better to similar trials. The situation was no different for Paul’s disciples. Fair-weather believers—and their betraying tendencies—were common then and remain so today. I want you to note this and make application of this important principle as we now survey the Epistle of 2 Timothy with this theme in mind.

II. 2 TIMOTHY 1

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my beloved son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day, longing to see you, even as I recall your tears, so that I may be filled with joy (vv. 1–4).

This last epistle Paul wrote (A.D. 67) before his own martyrdom is filled with intense emotion. The setting is this: Paul is writing this letter to Timothy, his disciple who is now pastoring the church in Ephesus. More closely, the church had been overrun by false teachers (cf. 1 Timothy). Timothy’s mettle is being tested through persecution, so Paul writes him in ways most appropriate to best help him through the matters he pressingly faces:

For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you

as well. For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher. For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day. Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you (vv. 5–14).

Timothy was faltering as a pastor because of the troubles created by Hymenaeus and Alexander (cf. 1 Timothy 1:20). These problems (from a human perspective) were born from within the church he was leading; but from a spiritual perspective, Satan himself was propagating the turmoil. This pattern is quite similar today; most believers who are actively attempting



♥ VERSE OF THE WEEK

2 Timothy 1:7

For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.

to fulfill the Great Commission find “church” folk to be their greatest problem. That has certainly been my experience and most likely yours too.

Paul’s response is to exhort his disciple to *kindle afresh* his spiritual gifts of teaching, preaching, and evangelism and be like Paul himself. Sometimes past criticisms serve to paralyze future progress; Paul is saying the exact opposite should be true—even though the further manifestation of his spiritual gifts and devout commitment to the Great Commission would likely bring more personal *suffering!* Timothy—and you, my friend—should not be *ashamed* (1:12) about moving forward to achieve your destiny; after all, the continual, industrious fulfillment of your calling best silences your critics.

Paul charges us not to be *timid* (1:7; “weak-kneed”) during trials and persecution, using himself as an example. He is acting as a model for Timothy—himself *not* being *ashamed* of the gospel, even though he *suffers* greatly for proclaiming it. Paul is saying to his understudy and to you and me:

Our audience is one, our doctrine in the cross is exclusive, and our confidence in God’s sovereignty must be clear.

If Christ had called him, no man could put him asunder. True in and of Paul’s life and for Timothy’s is the strong inference of this passage. The application for you as a public servant is obvious—especially as folks take you to task prior to elections.

Hymenaeus and Alexander—two heretics who had taken over the leadership of the Ephesian church as already mentioned—had largely caused Timothy’s woes. One might say they were *in* the church, but as unbelievers and not *of* the church. This classification is important to make concerning people who hurt you. As will be seen in the remainder of this study, Paul experienced many other relationships where his friends broke in the wrong direction, *deserting* him or becoming *ashamed* of the gospel (cf. Romans 1:16). Unlike the two usurpers, these friends were in the church but could be classified differently—weak-kneed “believers” of a different sort.

You are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains; but when he was in Rome, he eagerly searched for me and found me—the Lord grant to him to find mercy from the Lord on that day—and you know very well what services he rendered at Ephesus (vv. 15–18).

Phygelus and *Hermogenes* are Paul’s first mention of at least three additional sets of folks in 2 Timothy who had abandoned him in ministry. Like Hymenaeus and Alexander, who are found in 1 Timothy, *Phygelus* and *Hermogenes* also turned out to be fair-weather friends. Nothing more is known about these two promising Christian leaders who were evidently close to Paul but jumped ship when later a personal cost of some sort arose. Acutely aware and having learned



The salvation and maturation of the saints—making disciples—compels us to live with an eternally based internal strength.





James Kent



from what had happened previously with *Phygelus* and *Hermogenes*, in this passage Paul bespeaks and models a contrasting attitude to Timothy. In the large context, Paul’s message to Timothy is this:

In times of trial and persecution, strong disciples refuse to equivocate, vacillate, or compromise on biblically clear matters, and they will not hesitate to be confrontational when necessary.

There was no room in Paul’s mind for weak-kneed Christianity.

III. 2 TIMOTHY 2

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (vv. 1–2).

In contrast to the weak-kneed, Paul instructs Timothy to *entrust* the gospel to *faithful men*. Not only Timothy, but every minister and fellow believer has 2 Timothy 2:2 laid to his or her charge. This passage is another way of expressing the Great Commission found in the Gospels. Notice that every believer needs to be *making disciples*. *Entrusting* the doctrine he or she has been given (from a reputable disciple maker) to another *who will be able to teach* yet *others* is the primary biblical methodology for the expansion of God’s kingdom. Four generations of *discipling* are in view in this one passage. Since *mathetes* is the Greek word for *disciple* and means “a learner,” it

is no wonder that the disciple maker herein and found elsewhere in Scripture is referred to as a *teacher* (*didasko*). A Bible teacher needs a learner, and a learner needs a Bible teacher. As stated earlier, in this same regard Paul said to the Ephesian elders in the book of Acts (those whom he had *discipled* for many years), *For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God* (20:27). This verse reveals what it means to be actively *strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus* (2:1); it is how one strengthens the limb which is lame (Hebrews 12:13), it is how one stands strong in persecution. It is the opposite of ending up spiritually weak-kneed.

Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus (v. 3).

Believers who do not desire to place themselves in the presence of and learn from Bible teachers are biblical enigmas. The person who avoids 2 Timothy 2:2 will not be epitomized by 2 Timothy 2:3. Those who are not being discipled and subsequently do not disciple others are in no position to endure or *suffer hardship* that would be attributed to their faithfulness to the Word of God. Biblically malnourished believers are always weak at the knees. (I should add that this is why placing Bible teachers in capitols is the only real means to sustain America. At the end of the day, either we have leaders who are disciples and disciplers of and for Christ who have spiritual moxie and can withstand the heat in the kitchen, or we don’t).

Paul bids his disciple remain loyal in the battle for truth.

“My children, I wish to talk to you. During my early and middle life I was, perhaps, rather skeptical with regard to some of the truths of Christianity. Not that I did not have the utmost respect for religion and always read my Bible, but the doctrine of the atonement was one I never could understand, and I felt inclined to consider as impossible to be received in the way Divines taught it. I believe I was rather inclined to Unitarianism; but of late years my views have altered. I believe in the doctrines of the prayer books as I understand them, and hope to be saved through the merits of Jesus Christ.... My object in telling you this is that if anything happens to me, you might know, and perhaps it would console you to remember, that on this point my mind is clear: I rest my hopes of salvation on the Lord Jesus Christ.”

— James Kent, judge, law professor, “Father of American Jurisprudence.”

William Kent, *Memoirs and Letters of James Kent*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1898), 276–277.



There is always a cost to doing battle for biblical truth; it will separate soldiers of Christ who are willing to *suffer hardship* in the battle for righteousness from those who are not, whose selfish purposes remain preeminent. The weak-kneed subvert Christ's interests to their own self-interests.

No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned (vv. 4–9).

Why have I chosen to amplify this theme of exhorting weak-kneed Christianity when conducting a general survey of this epistle? Notice the bookend statements (vv. 3, 9) of the aforementioned section of the epistle: a common theme of *suffering hardship* from start to finish. Such is *normative* for the follower of Christ—not optional—in biblically understood Christianity.

The increasing problem in American evangelicalism is a self-centered religiosity sold from the vast majority of pulpits.

Be it a prosperity gospel, a self-help “seeker-friendly” sermon or a hyper-charismatic emphasis where the listener is programmed to have self-centered versus transcendent thoughts during worship, all are less than what Paul is saying to Timothy are earmarks of strong-kneed Christianity! Paul consistently talks more about *slaying* self (cf. Romans 6:2–6; Galatians 2:20) than *gratifying* self.

Paul repeatedly states that *suffering hardship*, persecution, and trials is typical of authentic Christianity. Conditioned otherwise, what routinely occurs then when persecution arises is that hordes of “believers” duck out of sight. Why? Because persecution is not what they originally signed up for! “I thought Christianity was supposed to prosper me, give me my best life now, and make me feel ‘spiritual’—not cost me! Suffer hardship? What’s that? I’m outta here!” is summarily the conclusion of the unfulfilled expectations of the weak-kneed.

Further, let’s peer into the three metaphors Paul uses in 2 Timothy 2 to describe and characterize real Christianity: the *soldier*, the *athlete* and the *farmer*. In context, Paul is illustrating to full-time ministers such as Timothy, and by way of extension to all *disciple makers*, their need to be *undistracted* (as is characteristic of *soldiers*), in this case by worldly, selfish pursuits. They are to be *obedient* (as is characteristic of *athletes*), in this case to the Word of God as it pertains to all ministry and ministry philosophy. And they are to be *hard-working* (as is characteristic of *farmers*), in this case to the end goal of *making disciples*.

Roger Sherman



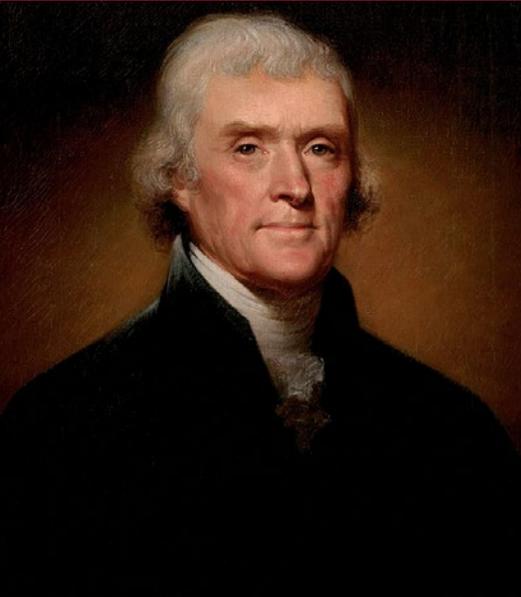
“God commands all men everywhere to repent. He also commands them to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and has assured us that all who do repent and believe shall be saved ... [G]od ... has absolutely promised to bestow them on all these who are willing to accept them on the terms of the Gospel—that is, in a way of free grace through the atonement. “Ask and ye shall receive [John 16:24]. Whosoever will, let him come and take of the waters of life freely [Revelation 22:17]. Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out” [John 6:37].

— Roger Sherman, signer of the Declaration of Independence, signer of the Constitution, “Master Builder of the Constitution,” judge, framer of the Bill of Rights, U.S. senator.

Correspondence Between Roger Sherman and Samuel Hopkins (Worcester, MA: Charles Hamilton, 1889), 9, from Roger Sherman to Samuel Hopkins, June 28, 1790.



Thomas Jefferson



“I am a real Christian—that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus Christ.”

— Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States, signer of the Declaration of Independence, diplomat, governor of Virginia, secretary of state.

Thomas Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Albert Ellery Bergh, editor (Washington, D.C.: The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1904), Vol. XIV, 385, to Charles Thomson on January 9, 1816.



Being undistracted, obedient, and hard-working are all requisites—fundamental disciplines—necessary for anyone who wants to *make disciples* over the course of their lifetime. All are totally the opposite characteristics of weak-kneed “believers.”

Paul now segues into revealing his motives for ministry as is evidenced in and by the following passage. The motive? He perseveres under persecution for the sake of the *chosen* and their *salvation*:

For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory. It is a trustworthy statement: For if we 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 (vv. 10–13).

As ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20), Paul, you, and I have a deep-seated reason for living, even when the environment is so hostile as to suggest we should somehow bow out. The *salvation* and maturation of the saints—making disciples—compels us to live with an eternally based internal strength.

There is no greater cause, purpose, or motivation than to clearly understand our biblical identity and marching orders in Christ.

These internal, theological truths should lead to personal endurance in

ministry (orthodoxy leads to orthopraxy). Conversely, the person who is weak-kneed to the point of denying Christ (v. 12) when under persecution, in a continual sense, is not saved to begin with, i.e., the trial serves to separate the saints from the “ain’ts.” Trials and persecution are sometimes meant by God to identify and separate the tares present among the wheat of the body of Christ (cf. 1 John 2:19).

Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some. Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, “The Lord knows those who are His,” and, “Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.”

Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the



Lord from a pure heart. But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will (vv. 14–26).

Paul informs Timothy not to engage in debates with false teachers. Conversely, he is to spend his energies *accurately handling the word of truth* (v. 15). This separation from false teachers, however, does not mean he fails to warn others about them (cf. Galatians 1:16–19; Ephesians 5:6–11; Jude 3). As a matter of fact, many of the New Testament letters are polemics alerting the saved to false teachings and teachers; such is a major component of biblical ministry. Before departing from this chapter, notice that *Philitus* was yet another person who betrayed Paul in ministry. The list grows.

IV. 2 TIMOTHY 3

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power;

Avoid such men as these (vv. 1–5).

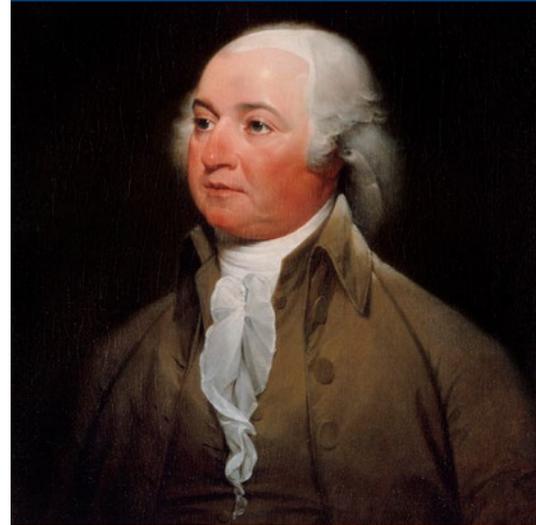
The power and focus of Christianity lies in the cross of Christ. The salvific Jesus, Who died on the cross as a substitutionary atonement for sin, affords us justification before a holy and righteous God. Whenever an individual or an organization changes this message, for example, viewing Jesus as a mere sociological change agent (Liberation Theology) or as a mere human role model for one to emulate in character (The Fellowship¹), they have changed the essence of the gospel. In so doing, they manifest exactly what Paul warns of in this passage: *holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power...* (v. 5).

**Jesus is much more than a
model moral code for living.
He and He alone is the
only way to heaven!**

For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith. But they will not make further progress; for their folly will be obvious to all, just as Jannes's and Jambres's folly was also.

Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me!

John Adams



“The general principles on which the fathers achieved independence were the general principles of Christianity. I will avow that I then believed, and now believe, that those general principles of Christianity are as eternal and immutable as the existence and attributes of God.”

— John Adams, second president of the United States, signer of the Declaration of Independence, judge; diplomat, one of two signers of the Bill of Rights.

Thomas Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (Washington D.C.: The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1904), Vol. XIII, 292–294. In a letter from John Adams to Thomas Jefferson on June 28, 1813.



Oliver Wolcott



“Through various scenes of life, God has sustained me. May He ever be my unfailing friend; may His love cherish my soul; may my heart with gratitude acknowledge His goodness; and may my desires be to Him and to the remembrance of His name.... May we then turn our eyes to the bright objects above, and may God give us strength to travel the upward road. May the Divine Redeemer conduct us to that seat of bliss which He himself has prepared for His friends; at the approach of which every sorrow shall vanish from the human heart and endless scenes of glory open upon the enraptured eye.”

— Oliver Wolcott, signer of The Declaration of Independence, military general, governor of Connecticut.

Letters of Delegates to Congress: January 1, 1776–May 15, 1776, Paul H. Smith, editor (Washington DC: Library of Congress, 1978), Vol. 3, 502–503, Oliver Wolcott to Laura Wolcott on April 10, 1776.

¹²Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (vv. 6–12).

Again, the clear promise from this Scripture is *persecution* is normative. I agree with commentators who hold verse 12 to be in contrast to verse 5: those who *hold to a form of godliness* (v. 5) will not be characterized by *persecution* (v. 12).² Why? Because Jesus and Paul repeatedly state the promise and association of genuine godliness and *persecution* in the following passages:

A. JESUS IN MATTHEW 10:22–23

“You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.”

B. JESUS IN LUKE 21:12

“But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name’s sake.”

C. JESUS IN JOHN 15:20

“Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you....”

D. PAUL IN ACTS 14:22

Strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”

E. PAUL IN 1 THESSALONIANS 3:4

For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.

All of these various passages serve to associate genuine *godliness* with *persecution*. Having gone elsewhere to underscore this point, let’s turn our attention back to 2 Timothy 3 now.

Paul’s contrast to verse 5 (of those who hold to *a form of godliness* but who, he says, have *denied its power*) continues in the passages that follow verse 12 (below). Note what he says in verses 13 through 15: it is the *power* of the Scriptures that lead others to *salvation*.

But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (vv. 13–15).

Paul is not talking about some kind of powerless social, exemplary Jesus here, i.e., *a form of godliness*; rather,



he is speaking about the salvific Jesus revealed in the sacred writings, the *Scriptures*—wherein is the *power*—the gospel to transform lives!

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (vv. 16–17).

Scripture repeatedly attests to its own inspiration. To hold any lesser view of it is to be in contradiction to what it says.

V. 2 TIMOTHY 4

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry (vv. 1–5).

Again, standing for truth and refuting error are normative. They beckon hardship, which believers need endure. Train yourself to expect this result.

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come (v. 6).

Paul’s personal martyrdom was near. The Greek language he uses is picturesque, likening himself to a ship’s losing its tether, slipping from the dock.

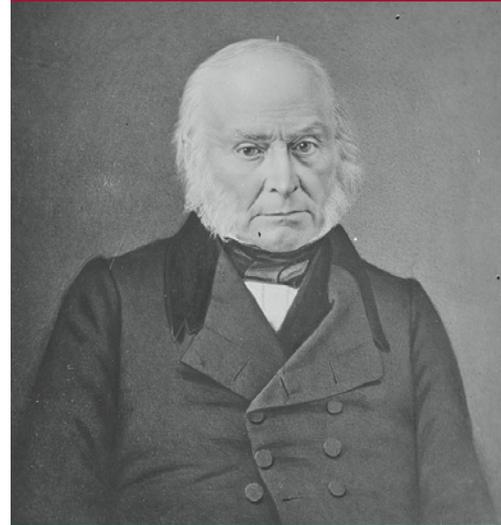
I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith (v. 7).

Again, normative to real ministry is the battle for truth and the refuting of error.

In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. Make every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica... (vv. 8–10).

Paul knew of his coming reward from the Savior Whom he had so faithfully served. *Demas*, on the other hand, is another weak-kneed defector. Why did he defect? The things of the world held a higher priority in his heart. In the book of Philemon (written earlier by Paul), the apostle called *Demas* a “fellow worker.” In Colossians 4:12–14 (approximately five years earlier) Paul signifies that he was a close associate. So for Paul to use the word *deserted* (*enkataleipo*) indicates a pendulum swing in *Demas*’ heart. The word means “utter abandonment.” *Demas* also needs to be added to the list of betrayers in ministry; he was a fair-weather follower. He saw where Paul’s life was headed, and he did not want

John Quincy Adams



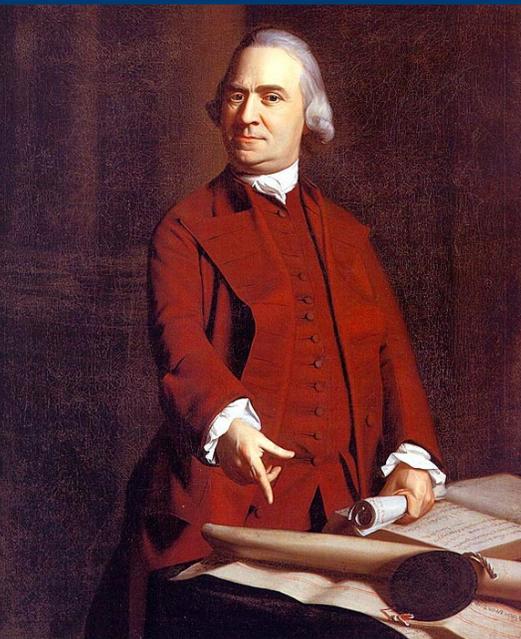
“The hope of a Christian is inseparable from his faith. Whoever believes in the divine inspiration of the holy Scriptures, must hope that the religion of Jesus shall prevail throughout the earth. Never since the foundation of the world have the prospects of mankind been more encouraging to that hope than they appear to be at the present time. And may the associated distribution of the Bible proceed and prosper, till the Lord shall have made ‘bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.’”
[Isaiah 52:10]

— John Quincy Adams, sixth president of the United States, diplomat, secretary of state, U.S. senator, U.S. representative, “Old Man Eloquent,” “Hell-Hound of Abolition.”

William H. Seward, *Life and Public Services of John Quincy Adams* (New York: C.M. Saxton, Barker & Co., 1860), 249.



Samuel Adams



to risk persecution and imprisonment with him. In your heart are you like Paul or *Demas*? Time and persecution will tell.

“The name of the Lord (says the Scripture) is a strong tower; thither the righteous flee and are safe [Proverbs 18:10]. Let us secure His favor and He will lead us through the journey of this life and at length receive us to a better.”

— Samuel Adams, signer of the Declaration of Independence, father of the American Revolutionary War, ratifier of the U.S. Constitution, governor of Massachusetts.

Letters of Delegates to Congress: August 16, 1776-December 31, 1776, Paul H. Smith, editor (Washington DC: Library of Congress, 1979), Vol. 5, 669–670, Samuel Adams to Elizabeth Adams on December 26, 1776.

PAUL’S BETRAYERS

As seen in this study, Paul encountered many weak-kneed people during his ministry. If we too are intent on the gospel, the Great Commission, and the pursuit of making disciples, should we anticipate that all our friendships will turn out great? No, they will not.

1. The Envious Ministers (Philippians 1:15)

In Paul’s imprisonment, some believers used the opportunity to discount him. Paul’s response was to say that if Christ was proclaimed, no matter the motives of his opponents, he’d rejoice (but nonetheless he balanced his message in Philippians 1:20).

2. Barnabas (Acts 15:39)

Co-workers in the Great Commission, they had a sharp disagreement later in ministry and went separate ways.

3. Alexander and Hymenaeus (1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Timothy 4:14)

These two men were heretics who stole the church that Paul spent three years laboring to plant in Ephesus.

4. Phygelus and Hermogenes (2 Timothy 1:15)

Nothing much is known about these two promising Christian leaders, who were evidently close to Paul. When a personal cost of some sort later arose, the two men jumped ship (cf. 2 Timothy 1:16).

5. Philetus (2 Timothy 2:17)

Paired with Hymenaeus in this passage (the heretic mentioned in 1 Timothy 1:20), Philetus too had rejected sound doctrine.

6. Demas (2 Timothy 4:10)

In the Philemon epistle (written by Paul earlier), Paul called Demas a “fellow worker.” In Colossians 4:12–14 (approximately five years earlier) Paul signifies that he was a close associate. So for Paul to use the word *deserted* (*enkataleipo*) in 2 Timothy 4:10 indicates a pendulum swing in Demas’ heart. The word means “utter abandonment.” Paul said Demas loved the present world more.

The next opponent and persecutor Paul lists was *Alexander the coppersmith*. This most likely is the same Alexander (of *Alexander* and *Hymenaeus* fame) previously mentioned at the start of this study (1 Timothy 1:20). He was never a disciple like *Demas*. *Alexander* could



have been similar in trade to Demetrius the silversmith (Acts 19:24) who greatly resented the apostle because of his impact on his business. Whatever the case, Paul's preaching altered *Alexander's* career, and as a result, he *harmed* Paul, though the text does not specifically say how:

Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching (vv. 10b–15).

Notable is Paul's response to such a man: he states *the Lord will repay him according to his deeds* (cf. Romans 12:19). As difficult as this is, vengeance is not a biblically appropriate action for any human in response to *harm*.

Vengeance is God's business alone; His adjudication is more accurately compensatory.

This is a very real thing that God does—just give Him time and allow Him the space to do it! He protects His under shepherds.

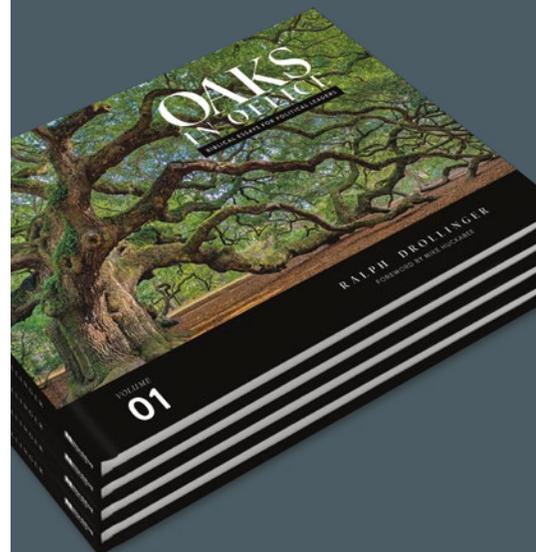
At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them (v. 16).

As if Phygelus, Hermogenes, and Demas were not sufficient personal illustrations of weak-kneed believers in

2 Timothy, Paul summarily states that in a general sense *no one supported me, but all deserted me*. When Paul was in Roman court, he had no friend to stand with him; they all *deserted* him. Had Onesiphorus or Luke been there, they would have surely stood with him, but Paul often went through persecution with no friends and no encouragement! Stop and think about being in that state—and exactly how remarkable a man Paul was! In these lonely times, intimacy and inner strength in and with Christ are forged in the believer's life. In Philippians, also written from prison, Paul states, *that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings...* (3:10). Spiritual maturity, intimacy with Christ, and becoming a disciple are accomplished in persecution and abandonment, wherein Christ is the believer's sole hope and resource. And facing those circumstances is a very good thing. Nothing will build your core strength quite like Christ does! So count it all joy (James 1:2)!

Philippians 2:20–21 is another sobering passage along these same lines, wherein Paul states, *For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests....* At the culmination of the apostle's great ministry, wouldn't it seem that, by then, he would have had a band of men to achieve any ministry task imaginable! But he did not.

Weak-kneed believers are more common and more to be anticipated than soul mates whose



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love for Christ transcends all forms of self-interest.

But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen (vv. 17-18).

VI. CONCLUSION

Despite his oft-dire physical condition and the too often emotional abandonments of those whom he'd earlier deemed loyal, such circumstances never affected his spirit! Paul had a pliable heart, but very thick skin by the time he wrote 2 Timothy—at the zenith of his life and ministry. He possessed an intimacy with Christ and a resounding faith that totally transcended, eclipsed, and governed the emotions of his earthly condition! He ruled his spirit—not the other way around! Noticeably missing from this epistle is any sense of bitterness or resentment. Romans 8:35-39 reveals the deep thinking of this wonderful man and provides an apt capstone to this book survey:

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- 1. The Fellowships' 2005 IRS 990 Statement of Organization's Primary Exempt Purpose, Part III: "...modeling the principles of Jesus...under the thoughts of Jesus."
2. George W. Knight III, The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Pastoral Epistles (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmanns, 1992), 442.

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