

Called to Persevere II Timothy 1:8-2:12

Introduction: How do Christians face increased persecution because of their faith? It is not getting any easier to openly express our faith. Paul's plea to Timothy to persevere in his faith even when it is difficult is certainly a challenge for all of us. Read II Timothy 1:8, 1:12, 1:16, 2:3, and 2:12 and 4:5.

To understand what was behind the challenge Paul gave to Timothy, we should look at the setting in which this letter was written. It was somewhere in the mid-60's AD. Paul was in prison in Rome. It was an extremely difficult time for the church. Persecution had broken out, often at the instigation of the Jewish community. There was persecution against the church in general and key leaders in particular. Paul was one of the victims. He had been arrested and taken to Rome. Although the charges against Paul were for his religious convictions, as far as Rome was concerned, they were political. Because of his activity in establishing the church he was labeled an enemy of the state. Christianity did not recognize the emperor as God and its followers refused to worship him as such. That was considered treason, even as opposing, on the basis of our faith, certain practices and activities in America is considered anti-American today.

Because Paul was viewed as an enemy of Rome, anyone who associated with him would have been viewed in the same way and could potentially have been arrested also. To put it in a modern setting, if you knew someone who had been arrested for domestic terrorism and you opted to visit that person in prison every week, you would probably be watched by our government. In Paul's day association with him meant one was a believer and, therefore, like him, unwilling to worship the emperor.

It was a very difficult time for one to openly be a Christian and Paul wrote to Timothy, who obviously felt the pressure of the time, and encouraged him to stand firm, to carry on, not to waver in his faith, to persevere even when it was difficult and perhaps costly.

Today may not be a lot different. Christians often find themselves in a position where it seems embarrassing to admit openly that they are Christians. It is difficult to express their dislike for an activity accepted by society because, as Christians, we believe the Bible condemns it. It is often difficult to witness to a friend, let alone a stranger. Being a true Christian in America today is not easy. Because of this, the message to Timothy has relevance to us today.

In Paul's letter to Timothy he set forth a number of reasons why Timothy, and in turn we, should not be embarrassed to stand firm in our faith and endure persecution in whatever form that may take.

Paul began his call to perseverance in a rather unusual way. He wrote that we can face persecution of any kind because God is in absolute control and He will enable us to endure. Read II Timothy 1:8. Paul wrote that he was a prisoner of the Lord. If you had been in Rome in the

mid-60's AD when Paul wrote that and you had asked anyone who had arrested and was holding Paul in prison, you would have been told it was the Romans. Paul, however, was so convinced of the sovereign control of God that he wrote he was in reality a prisoner of the Lord. God did not cause it but God was with him in it and since he was in prison for his faith, he was actually God's prisoner.

Then Paul wrote that we should persevere because of the significance of the truth that we are committed to. Read II Timothy 1:8-10. Those verses present a powerful picture of the gospel that transforms life.

Whenever we are tempted to turn our backs on a witness because we are afraid of what people will say or think, remember how marvelous our message is. Since the message of Jesus is so important, why should we not talk about it gladly and often? Remember all we have been saved from and all we have today in Jesus. Remember all that is guaranteed for both tomorrow and eternity because of Jesus death and resurrection. In the everyday activities of life we can easily forget or minimize the greatness of our faith. The moment we forget how great our salvation is, we find it difficult to be bold, to persevere for Jesus. The cure is to remind ourselves often just how marvelous our faith is and all that we have because of it.

Paul wrote next that he had suffered for the gospel but the blessings that had come to him as a result of that far outweigh the cost. Read II Timothy 1:11-12.

Paul knew that in the end the One who had saved him would keep him and in eternity, if not in the present, God would bless him. Paul always counted it a joy to suffer for Jesus for two reasons. *First*, he loved Jesus so much and was so thankful for all Jesus suffered for him that he counted it a privilege to suffer for Him. *Second*, he knew where it was all going, and God is faithful to fulfill every promise. No loss of reputation, friends, promotions or whatever that occur because of our witness can ever compare to what we have here and will have in eternity.

Read II Timothy 1:13-14 and 2:1-2. We are to persevere because we are the custodians of truth that must be passed on to the next generation. Paul wrote to Timothy to guard the truth that he had learned, truth concerning who Jesus is, what Jesus did on the Cross, what His resurrection means to us, and His promise to come again. When persecution comes it is easier to modify our belief to fit current thinking than to hold fast to the truth of Scripture.

Not only was Timothy to guard the truth, he was to pass it on to men and women who were then able to pass it on to the next group of believers. If no one in our generation remains faithful to the Gospel and shares it with others, the church will be gone in 75 years. While that is not going to happen to the church universal because God will not allow it, it can easily happen in any given local church.

Read II Timothy 1: 15-18. Initially they seem to be a parenthesis in Paul's letter discussion of persecution. In those verses Paul wrote of those who had abandoned him because of the situation

he was in. I doubt that surprise him. We all tend to avoid those who are being ridiculed. If one of our friends is being picked on, it is hard for us to come to his or her rescue and jump in with *“Hey, I believe the same thing.”* One man did jump in for Paul and he meant so much to Paul because of it that his name is recorded for all of history. Persevering is not just for us, but a help and encouragement to all others of like faith and commitment.

Paul ended this section by illustrating endurance in three different ways. Read II Timothy 2:3-7. Paul wrote of a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer. Each is slightly different, but they all illustrate the same truth; victory, winning, bearing fruit demands faithfulness and a lot of hard work. All three of those groups spend huge amounts of time doing what, at the time, seems almost useless because there is no immediate application. The soldier goes to basic training so that one day he will be successful in war. An athlete trains so he can win the contest. The farmer sows and cares for his crop months before any fruit comes forth. What happens to a soldier in war who refused to go through basic training? What happens to an athlete if he had not exercised before the games? What happens at harvest if the farmer had not sown seed? What happens to our witness if we have gone weeks without doing those things that enable us to stand firm when the time comes?

Paul’s message to Timothy is a message to each of us. Persevere, stand firm, endure, face ridicule, rejection, or loss as those called to the greatest blessing available to man, life in Jesus. Not only must we carry on, we need to encourage others to do the same. It will take endurance, training, consistency, determination, pressing on in our witness, even when it appears that it is doing little good. The time will come when we will need that faith and courage to stand firm and in the end the victory will be ours, the crown will go to the winner, the fruit will come forth.

God calls us to persevere because in holding fast He can work both in us and through us and in the end that is what it is all about. That is how we will receive the crown of glory when He comes again or calls us home.