

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (9-2-1997 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

2 Timothy 1:13 – 2:2

Additional Bible reading: Deuteronomy 6:1-9

### Introduction

Next Paul reminded Timothy of his duties, because he had to be leader of the work after Paul had died. He needed to protect and guard the Gospel, especially in the dangerous days in which he was living. Paul told him how this was to be done. Then finally he looked to the future, telling Timothy he must train others to minister to the coming generations.

### Responsibility to guard and protect the Gospel

**What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us** (2 Timothy 1:13,14). These verses describe the Gospel as “a pattern of sound teaching” and a “good deposit”.

It is a pattern of sound teaching because it sets out the essentials of the Christian truth. The Greek word used for “sound” is the same word used by the Gospel writers to describe people whom Jesus had healed (e.g. the Centurion’s servant in Luke 7:10). The basic truths of the Gospel are non-negotiable, and cannot be compromised. They make the Christian and the church healthy in a spiritual sense. Neglecting these truths does harm and weaken them.

As a good deposit, the Gospel has been committed to us by God, and has to be treated as a precious treasure. We must keep it safe. Christ had entrusted it to Paul, and now Paul entrusted it to Timothy. The Greek word for good can also mean beautiful. It must be guarded so it does not get lost or damaged. The word for “guard” is the same word used for a strong man guarding a palace (Luke 11:21), and Saul guarding the clothes of the men stoning Stephen (Acts 22:20). People were going around with heretical teaching, bent on corrupting the Gospel – a precious treasure. Timothy must be on the look out, and not be naïve. The touchstone or test of any teaching was to be Paul’s teaching. It is a good test of any church or organisation’s basis of faith – is it a helpful summary of Paul’s and the New Testament’s teaching?

There have always been attacks on the Gospel. Some people today will say that modern man cannot accept the New Testament Gospel, and it needs to be adapted to make it more acceptable. It may sound plausible – but blindness about the Gospel is not the Gospel’s fault, it is the fault of the eyes. Our duty is not to alter or water down the Gospel, but to work and pray to remove barriers from people’s eyes. **The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes** (Romans 1:16).

There is a particular reason why Paul urges Timothy to guard the Gospel. In and around Ephesus (the capital of Roman province of Asia) there were tragic happenings. There was a mass turning away from Paul. Churches where he had laboured and which depended heavily on him had deserted him. Was it because of his re-arrest and because they felt the Christian cause was lost? Phygelus and Hermogenes were the

ringleaders. Paul's sensitive nature was very affected by it. In his hour of need they had let him down. He must have known how Jesus felt when His disciples forsook Him and fled.

But in every situation, if there are things to grieve about, there are also things to be pleased about. This is true in churches now, as it was then. One exception to the gloom was Onesiphorus, who had often entertained Paul and rendered him other service. His name means "bringer of profit", and he had lived up to his name. He was not ashamed of Paul's chains, and had not turned away from him. Evidently he had followed Paul to Rome, and searched everywhere till he found him. He took his life in his hands in this quest for a condemned man, but he remained true to his friend (and probably his spiritual father) Paul. No doubt he kept visiting him with food and other comforts. **May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day!** (2 Timothy 1:18).

In this situation of almost universal apostasy, Timothy was urged to hold firm to sound teaching and keep safe the good deposit of the Gospel. This is a word to us to be faithful when many are deserting the Gospel. Also it speaks to us to be like Onesiphorus, being aware of lonely Christians, and being of service to them.

#### Means whereby we can guard and protect the Gospel

It was all very well for a great spiritual giant like Paul to give his orders, but how does an ordinary man – let alone a man of Timothy's timid temperament – on his own, stand firm in the middle of a general landslide, and guard the Gospel? The answer is that he does not have to do it by himself. Timothy still had this timid temperament. There is no suggestion that he just had to grit his teeth and set his jaw and just hope for the best. The means was provided by God's Holy Spirit. **With the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.... be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus** (2 Timothy 1:14, 2:1). He did not need to be strong in himself, but in the Godhead, the indwelling Holy Spirit and the grace which is found in Christ Jesus.

We need grace, not only for salvation, but also for service. Never mind what others say and do. Never mind how helpless you feel. How can a weak man be strong? How can a shy man be brave? The answer is grace. Weakness and diffidence are no excuses. God says you can. The same God who was at work in Paul is at work in you. **I can do everything through him who gives me strength** (Philippians 4:13). **My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness** (2 Corinthians 12:9). God reveals Himself in our weakness, to show forth His strength. We stand trembling on the edge, waiting till we feel strong enough. But we shall wait forever. We are to move forward in faith, and then we will find that God enables. Then we must remain in Him, else we will lapse again into weakness.

This is how all the great men of God have experienced the power of God in their lives. They were not supermen, but were weak like us. However, they were strong in Him. They ventured forward, and found that He undertook. "All God's giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on His being with them." (Hudson Taylor). "My preaching is to be the doing of His will. I am just a staff in His hand to do His work in the meantime. His work is the main thing." (Andrew Bonar). William Chapman said that one sentence from F.B.Meyer's writings

had altered his life: “Usefulness in God’s service is largely affected by this question – whether we work for God, or whether God by His Spirit works and speaks through us.”

It is most important that we have first-hand experience of God’s power. It is easy to live off other people’s experiences. We need to know the Lord for ourselves.

#### The truth of the Gospel to be transmitted to the coming generation

It is not enough that we remain true to the Gospel ourselves. We must have an eye for the coming generation. **The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others** (2 Timothy 2:2). There is nothing secretive about the Christian message. It is open, above board, and quite public. Men would be able to make comparison between Paul’s teaching and Timothy’s teaching, because it was done openly.

Paul has in mind four stages. (1) He received the message from Christ. (2) He delivered Christ’s message to Timothy. (3) Timothy was to teach it to men who were qualified (faithful, dependable, reliable, and able to teach). (4) And these men were to pass it on to the next generation. Here is true apostolic succession – succession in the message, not in men. We hold to and pass on the apostolic teaching when we faithfully teach the contents of the New Testament scriptures.

Much of the Bible emphasis is on passing on God’s message faithfully to the next generation. Abraham was required by God to instruct his children and household that they keep to the way of the Lord (Genesis 18:19). Israel was taught through Moses - **Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up** (Deuteronomy 6:7). **He commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands** (Psalm 78:5-7). Jesus concentrated on teaching the disciples, so that they could teach others (Mark 8:31). Paul said, **God was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles** (Galatians 1:15,16).

We ourselves know the truth because others taught us, who were themselves taught by others. Riches Sibbes, an old Puritan, wrote a book called “*The Bruised Reed*”. One day this book fell into the hands of a tin peddler, who gave it to a boy called Richard Baxter, who went on to become a great preacher. Baxter wrote “*A call to the unconverted*”, which kindled the flame in the heart of Phillip Doddridge. Doddridge wrote “*The Rise and Progress of the Reign of Saul*”, which fell into the hands of William Wilberforce, changed his life, and led him to work for the emancipation of slaves in the British Empire. He also wrote “*A Practical View of Christianity*”, and by reading this, the heart of Leigh Richmond was changed. He wrote “*The Dairyman’s Daughter*”, which had a powerful spiritual influence on Queen Victoria, and also transformed Thomas Chalmers, whose life and ministry brought immeasurable blessings to the people of Scotland.

There is a very real responsibility for us. We owe all to those who taught us. We stand between two generations. We must teach the next generation. We are not meant to be individualists, but members of a relay team. We are links in a chain. This is especially urgent at the present. We cannot leave it to others. There is enormous decline in Christian influence and knowledge of Christian truth. It is not taught in schools, so we must do our part. We must adopt God's strategy, of passing the message on to the next generation, and this must continue till the Second Coming.

### Conclusion

We had a pattern of sound teaching and a good deposit in the Gospel that has been committed to us. We must guard and protect it, by the power of the Holy Spirit working in us, and by the grace of Christ Jesus. Then we must pass it on to future generations, ensuring plenty are trained to teach the Good News.