

2 TIMOTHY 2:7

THINK ABOUT IT!

“Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.”¹

Anticipate opposition and hostility if you are a Christian. Don’t seek conflict; but don’t be surprised when opposition arises. We Christians seek peace with all people and we will do all possible to make peace. Nevertheless, the successful Christian will experience opposition and hostility because he is a Christian. It is not merely that the believer will experience opposition—the believer will reveal his or her relationship to the Master through standing firm in the face of hostility and opposition. I am not counselling stoic resolution in the face of torment; I am counselling a steadfast faith despite opposition.

In a similar vein, the successful Christian will be compelled to avoid certain actions and attitudes if he will be successful in the Christian life. Many tasks assigned to believers will seem mundane, pedestrian, ordinary; and the believer will be tempted to ignore such seemingly banal, prosaic tasks. He must faithfully fulfil all that Christ assigns because the One assigning the believer’s tasks is Master of life. In the same manner, there will be victories that the spiritual Christian will enjoy as God directs his path through this fallen world.

Paul has been advising the young minister to whom the Apostle had entrusted so much responsibility. Timothy had been mentored by the Apostle to the Gentiles, had no doubt been corrected on occasion and frequently admonished as he observed and learned of the work of service to the churches. One lesson he had no doubt heard was repeated in various ways in what was likely the final letter that Paul would pen to the young pastor. The Apostle had no doubt taught, and now was stressing, the necessity of delayed gratification in Christian service.

As we have seen through our studies, Paul penned three metaphors Timothy was to ponder as he pursued his role as a teacher. Pastors are to be teachers of the Word. As such, they are to be always sensitive to those who will in turn be appointed by God to the task of declaring the Word of God. Be cautious in imagining that a church seeks out a teacher. God appoints whom He wills and the church is responsible to receive God’s appointment. One of the grave responsibilities for any teacher of the Word is to ensure that a teacher is raised up to follow him.

The Apostle spoke of the labours of a teacher with a student when he wrote, “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” [2 TIMOTHY 2:2]. If done properly, teaching is demanding work. The wise teacher understands she is moulding young minds, stimulating them to acquire knowledge and enabling them to build on that knowledge. The finished product will not be seen for many years.

The teacher instructing a child in the mathematic times tables isn’t simply teaching the child to memorise some numbers—she is laying a foundation for that child’s future—perhaps to become an accountant, to employ mathematics to build spaceships that will transport mankind to the planets. Likewise, the man who teaches others in righteousness is not merely laying down rules by which listeners are to live; he is equipping parishioners to excel in godliness. Perhaps among those who listen and absorb what is taught is one who will one day speak for God to great numbers of people, building them in this most holy Faith. Perhaps a family will be restored or someone in the grip of sin will be victorious because of what is taught.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Among the students I taught while in Dallas are men who are today pastoring large congregations, building multiplied numbers of believers in the Faith. I know of other former students who have established churches where there were none. Other students are themselves teaching university students and equipping preachers to stand firm on the front lines of the Faith. I'm always humbled when I see the name of a former student who today serves as President of one of the great seminaries of the world. I shared in shaping his life to the glory of God.

The Apostle also spoke, as he often did, of a soldier.² He urged Timothy, "Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him" [2 TIMOTHY 2:3, 4]. Soldiers are required to be single-minded in pursuit of fulfilling the mission. The soldier must adapt, innovate and persevere to accomplish the labour assigned. Combat is not glorious; whatever glory there is comes only after the mission is completed.

Then Paul wrote of an athlete. This was another theme often found in the Apostle's missives.³ You will recall from previous messages that we explored what Paul meant when he wrote, "An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules" [2 TIMOTHY 2:5]. Champions are not automatically awarded ribbons or medals; these are awards for those who excel in a given sport because they disciplined their bodies both to compete and to win. Super bowl rings are only awarded to the team that plays with the greatest discipline and which exhibits the greatest teamwork. That well-ordered team is the result of days and nights of hard work to move together in order to win the most games.

Finally, the Apostle spoke of a farmer. In this, he was perhaps echoing the frequent parables of the Master who spoke frequently of themes drawn from farming.⁴ Paul wrote, "It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops" [2 TIMOTHY 2:6]. This was a reminder that a farmer must be willing to prepare the soil, plant his seed in anticipation of a harvest, constantly working to ensure that the crop is safe from pests and from those who might steal what he has laboured over. His harvest is always months after he had planted his seed.

Having presented these verbal images of delayed gratification, Paul insists that Timothy, and hence all who would read these words, must not only acknowledge that what he wrote is true, but they must take it to heart and act on what is said. That is the message today.

THINK ABOUT IT — "Think over what I say." Well, what has Paul said? Whatever the man of God said, it must have been important. It behooves us to read carefully and to consider wisely what has been said. When we read Scripture, many times we read the words and fail to grasp the message. I suspect that to be the case too often as we read the admonition Paul has given in this portion of his final missive to the young theologian.

"Think over" translates a Greek word which is written as a present imperative. As he read Paul's words, Timothy would have understood that Paul was saying that he was to repeatedly, habitually ponder what Paul had just written. In short, the word pictures Paul has drawn are essential for understanding. Ignoring these truths must lead to disaster in Christian service. The word Paul used means, in itself, to understand a point through reflection and contemplation. Timothy was to incorporate the truth that Paul had presented so that it would be thoroughly integrated into his life.

² E.g., 1 CORINTHIANS 9:7; PHILIPPIANS 2:25; PHILEMON 2; see also 1 TIMOTHY 6:12; 2 TIMOTHY 4:7

³ E.g., 1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27; EPHESIANS 6:12; cf. PHILIPPIANS 3:14; COLOSSIANS 2:18

⁴ E.g. MATTHEW 9:37, 38; MATTHEW 13:3 ff.; MATTHEW 21:33 ff.; MARK 4:3 ff.; LUKE 8:5 ff.; LUKE 10:1 ff.; JOHN 4:35-38

That Paul was specifically commanding Timothy to focus on what he had just written is evident from the phrase, “what I say.” As previously stated, the Apostle had presented three metaphors while emphasising the necessity of being a wise teacher. I emphasise the underlying theme again in part because it is neglected in this day; yet, the teaching is essential. The teaching in question is this—*those who serve must not expect immediate gratification as result of their labours*. Christians, and especially those who labour behind the sacred desk, must maintain a long view of their service. We teach in expectation that we are building a holy temple to the glory of God. The message we bring is meant to strengthen the people of God, equipping them for holy service and preparing them to meet the Risen Saviour face-to-face.

Service before the Lord and to His people has one singular aim—to present God’s people mature in Christ. In the Ephesian encyclical, Paul provides necessary insight into how the Master works among His people. This is what the Apostle has written: “[Christ the Lord] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” [EPHESIANS 4:11-16]. God’s purpose is to ensure that the saints are provided the incentive and the means to mature. Mature manhood is the goal. Ladies, don’t take umbrage at that, for the goal is assumption of responsibility as one who serves under divine appointment. The goal is to focus on the goal of maturity rather than seeking only to serve for what you can get out of it.

He is every bit as pointed in his letter to the saints in Philippi. There, the Apostles writes, “My brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

“Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained” [PHILIPPIANS 3:1-16].

The labours of the Apostle were marked by trial from those who opposed him and the message of grace. Some who opposed the Apostle were so tied to either Jewish or pagan religion that they were threatened by the freedom in Christ which Paul presented. Others, professing Christians, endeavoured to advance themselves through opposing the Apostle. Such individuals, puffed up with pride and intent on promoting themselves through making disciples for themselves plague the churches to this day.

Of his labours and the testing he endured, the Apostle has written, “I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” [COLOSSIANS 1:24-29].

Paul sometimes pointed to others who struggled just as he did for the believers. One such individual is a man named Epaphras. Writing the Church in Colossae, Paul spoke of this saint. “Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis” [COLOSSIANS 4:12, 13]. Epaphras’ concern was that the saints in Colossae, in Laodicea and in Hierapolis, would grow up in Christ. Therefore, he laboured in prayer for these believers, pleading with God to continue His work in their midst so that they would be mature in Christ.

Paul urged saints to grow up in the Faith. In the First Corinthian Letter, Paul has written, “Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature” [1 CORINTHIANS 14:20].

Think with me about this matter. Those of you who have children will know that a child is not ready to assume responsibility for all things according to your schedule. Perhaps you have seen the ad of a father who drives up in a new car. His son, a child of perhaps five or six, is riding a Big Wheel. The dad asks the son if he is ready and tosses him the keys to the automobile. The remainder of the ad shows the little lad driving his day to work with instructions of when to pick him up. Another vignette shows the lad driving the car, fuming while stuck in traffic. Yet another of the scenes is of the child running to avoid receiving a parking ticket. He whines that he was only gone for a minute. The ticket maid is unmoved. Reflecting on this, the child simply says to the dad’s offer, “No thanks. I’m good.” The ad works because the situation is ridiculous.

No six-year-old is responsible to operate a vehicle. Perhaps university students imagine themselves ready to take on the world and hire their own teachers, but they still have some growing to do. Wise parents do not permit children to dictate their education, to dictate their hours of sleep, to dictate what they will eat or drink. Wise parents accept responsibility for matters in the lives of their children. Only as children grow and demonstrate a measure of maturity do parents surrender control over their lives.

This is precisely what Paul has in view when he writes to the Corinthian Christians, “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways” [1 CORINTHIANS 13:11]. *Maturation is a process.*

That maturation is a process is even clearer in Paul's earlier Letter to Galatian Christians. "The heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God [**GALATIANS 4:1-7**].

Earlier in this letter, Paul had asserted, "The law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian" [**GALATIANS 3:24, 25**].

Let me come back to Paul's specific statements. The images presented—soldier, athlete and farmer—all point back to the unwelcome command to "share in suffering." The suffering is for a brief moment, but the rewards are eternal. The Apostle appears confident in pointing to a future reward for those who suffer, those who endure. Victory lies ahead for the soldier. The athlete will win a crown. The farmer will enjoy a harvest. However, the rewards are in the future. Despite the insistence of some modern churchmen, God calls His people to faithful endurance and not to success in this life. We shall succeed; but we must endure. Reflect on this truth. Use your mind.

WISDOM GIVEN AS YOU THINK — "The Lord will give you understanding in everything." Note the conjunction Paul used. By using "for," the Apostle is providing the reason why Timothy, indeed, all who will serve as the Lord's undershepherd, must take pains to obey. In maintaining focus and staying at the task, God gives light. Note further that Paul uses the future tense. He says "the Lord will give you understanding." The Apostle's words ring with certainty that the Master is giving a promise to His people through what is written.

God promises numerous gifts through His Word, and He clearly promises a gift for those who use their mind—the gift is "understanding." The word Paul uses is a compound used to describe the coming together of two different things. It describes the union of two rivers that flow together.⁵ In this case, Paul is referring to the dynamic union resulting from God's Word finding its place in Timothy's life. As Word and life converge, there is a divine spark that creates understanding that Timothy could not have previously enjoyed. Paul is not suggesting that Timothy or any servant of the Lord God will have understanding of the means by which God brought all things into existence or how the Spirit works or even how God has chosen whom He wills. Paul is saying that the man of God will understand how God works in the life of a believer through using his mind.

Understanding does not come through lectures or even through merely reading a book. Paul is pointing to divine work as the believer reasons; and that divine work brings the believer to understanding. The reason many people do not understand the Word is that they are unfamiliar with the Word. This is Paul's meaning when he writes in the First Corinthian Letter, "Among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" [**1 CORINTHIANS 2:6-8**].

⁵ Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg and Neva F. Miller, **Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament** (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI 2000), 366

When we speak of wisdom and understanding, we are speaking in particular of that heavenly wisdom that leads to life. This is that particular wisdom of which James has written, “Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” [JAMES 3:13-18]. Thus, divine wisdom expresses a godly demeanor of one who is righteous.

I thought of the words of the Wise Man as I prepared the message last evening. Opening the collection of pithy sayings that we know as Proverbs, Solomon writes:

“To know wisdom and instruction,
to understand words of insight,
to receive instruction in wise dealing,
in righteousness, justice, and equity;
to give prudence to the simple,
knowledge and discretion to the youth—
Let the wise hear and increase in learning,
and the one who understands obtain guidance,
to understand a proverb and a saying,
the words of the wise and their riddles.
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

[PROVERBS 1:2-7]

If we will know wisdom and if we will understand what is written, it is necessary to spend time thinking. What shall a wise man think? Among the Proverbs is one that I learned early in my Christian walk. I determined that I would frequently think of how I could apply this particular Proverb. The Proverb reads as follows: “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise” [PROVERBS 13:20a]. Spending time in the presence of the wise impels an individual to seek wisdom. The one investing time with the wise will emulate their lives.

I could not always hang around with those whom I admired and to whom I looked up, but I could read what was written by godly people. Those who stood out in Christian service would be worthy of my time, reading what they had written and considering the outcome of their lives. I began early in my Christian walk to read the Bible and to read what godly men and women had said concerning the portions of the Word I was reading. I amassed a large library, a major portion of which was biographies and commentaries written by those who had preceded me in the Faith. I was determined to spend as much time as possible seeking to know these people through their writings.

As an aside, on one occasion I had been asked to go to a church that was in considerable trouble. They had suffered a disastrous division. I requested shelving for my library, and the pulpit committee offered to purchase a shelf or two for some books. I laughed and explained that I would be bringing into the office a minimum of 1500 volumes that I would use regularly. This was but a small portion of my personal library. The books were my tools.

2 TIMOTHY 2:7
THINK ABOUT IT

Walking with the wise means that the man of God will need to invest time searching out the essence of the wisdom expressed, spending time in the presence of God. Again, turning to the sayings of the Wise Man, consider the manner in which he continues in the Second Chapter of the Book of Proverbs.

“My son, if you receive my words
and treasure up my commandments with you,
making your ear attentive to wisdom
and inclining your heart to understanding;
yes, if you call out for insight
and raise your voice for understanding,
if you seek it like silver
and search for it as for hidden treasures,
then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.
For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;
he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
he is a shield to those who walk in integrity,
guarding the paths of justice
and watching over the way of his saints.
Then you will understand righteousness and justice
and equity, every good path;
for wisdom will come into your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
discretion will watch over you,
understanding will guard you,
delivering you from the way of evil,
from men of perverted speech,
who forsake the paths of uprightness
to walk in the ways of darkness,
who rejoice in doing evil
and delight in the perverseness of evil,
men whose paths are crooked,
and who are devious in their ways.”

[PROVERBS 2:1-15]

This is nothing less than the answer to the prayer penned in the Psalms:

“Open my eyes, that I may behold
wondrous things out of your law.”

[PSALM 119:18]

Reading the Word and weighing what is read as you wait on the Spirit of God results in an exciting interchange taking place over the written Word of God. It is as we trust the Spirit of God to direct our thoughts that God reveals exciting truth.

2 TIMOTHY 2:7
THINK ABOUT IT

I should not rush past another portion of the sayings of the Wise Man, pausing to remind the people of God of Solomon.

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.
Be not wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.”

[PROVERBS 3:5-7]

Have you ever wondered by the wisdom displayed by some among the saints of the Most High? They have walked with the Lord and listened carefully to His choice servants. They may not speak often, but when they do speak, they seem to address the precise need that resolves your conflict. Where did these masters of the Faith receive their wisdom? The answer is provided in this singular verse. As they wait patiently on the Lord, allowing Him to speak to their hearts, they grow in understanding. We call them wise.

Do you not have a longing for such wisdom? Here is wisdom and understanding in all things. You need but accept what God offers. Amen.