

## Getting the Picture (2 Timothy 2)

While attending a convention, I noticed a man wearing two name badges. When I asked him why, he replied, “Oh, I’m having an identity crisis!”

Paul did not want Timothy to have an identity crisis, so he carefully explained what a pastor is and does. (Of course, the same principles apply to all Christians.) Paul represented seven pictures of the Christian minister.

### 1. The Steward (2:1–2)

The ministry is not something we get for ourselves and keep to ourselves. We are stewards of the spiritual treasure God has given us. It is our responsibility to guard the deposit and then invest it in the lives of others. They, in turn, are to share the Word with the next generation of believers.

It is important that we get our original treasure from the Word of God, and not from the ideas and philosophies of men. We do not test modern teachers by their popularity, education, or skill. We test them by the Word of God, and particularly the doctrines of grace as given by Paul. It is not we who examine Paul to see if he is right; it is Paul who examines us!

It takes strength to teach the Word of God. We must dig out of the rich mines of Scripture the “gold, silver, precious stones” that are hidden there (see Prov. 2:1–10; 3:13–15; 8:10–21; 1 Cor. 3:10–23). This strength can only come from God’s grace. The secret of Paul’s great ministry was the grace of God (1 Cor. 15:10).

The ability to study, understand, and teach the Word of God is a gift of God’s grace. “Apt to teach” is one of God’s requirements for the pastor (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:24). “Apt to teach” implies apt to learn; so a steward must also be a diligent student of the Word of God.

### 2. The Soldier (2:3–4, 8–13)

Paul often used military illustrations in his letters. This is not surprising since he lived in a military state and was in prison himself. He described in these verses the characteristics of a “good soldier of Jesus Christ.”

He endures hardship (v. 3). Many people have the idea that the ministry is a soft job. Preachers are often the butt of jokes that suggest they are lazy and should be ashamed of accepting their salaries. But a dedicated Christian minister is in a battle that requires spiritual endurance (see Eph. 6:10ff.).

He avoids worldly entanglements (v. 4). He is totally committed to his Commanding Officer, the One who enlisted him. In our case, this is Jesus Christ. I recall a story about a Civil War soldier who happened to be a watchmaker. One day the bugle sounded and the men were told to break camp. “But I can’t go now!” the soldier complained. “I have a dozen watches to repair!”

It is sometimes necessary for a pastor, or a pastor’s wife, to be employed because their church is not able to support them. This is a sacrifice on their part and an investment in the work. But a pastor who is fully supported should not get involved in sidelines that divide his interest and weaken his ministry. I have met pastors who spend more time on their real estate ventures than on their churches. Our purpose is to please the Lord, not ourselves.

He magnifies Jesus Christ (vv. 8–9). “Remember Jesus Christ!” is the way this phrase should be translated. It sounds almost like a war cry, like “Remember the Alamo!” or “Remember Pearl Harbor!” Jesus is the Captain of our salvation (Heb. 2:10), and our purpose is to bring honor and glory to Him. What an encouragement Jesus Christ is to a suffering Christian soldier! For He died and rose again, proving that suffering leads to glory, and that seeming defeat leads to victory. Jesus was treated as an evildoer, and His soldiers will be treated the same way.

The best way to magnify Christ is through the ministry of the Word. Paul was bound, but God’s Word cannot be bound. “His Word runneth very swiftly” (Ps. 147:15). “The Word of God grew and multiplied” (Acts 12:24).

He thinks of the whole army (v. 10). “The elect” are God’s people, chosen by His grace and called by His Spirit (2 Thess. 2:13–14). Paul not only suffered for the Lord’s sake, but he also suffered for the sake of the church. There were yet many people to reach with the gospel, and Paul wanted to help reach them. A soldier who thinks only of himself is disloyal and undependable.

He trusts his Commanding Officer (vv. 11–13). This “faithful saying” is probably part of an early statement of faith recited by believers. (For

other “faithful sayings” in the pastoral letters, see 1 Tim. 1:15; 4:9; and Titus 3:8.) It is faith in Jesus Christ that gives us victory (1 John 5:4). We do not fear the enemies, for He has already conquered them. Through our identification with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection, we have won the victory (see Rom. 6).

What a pair of paradoxes! Death leads to life! Suffering leads to reigning in glory! We have nothing to fear! The important thing is that we not “disown” our Lord, for if we disown Him here, He will disown us before the Father (Matt. 10:33). In that great “roll call” in glory, when the “medals” are given out, we will lose our reward if we disown His name.

But Paul makes it clear (2 Tim. 2:13) that even our own doubt and unbelief cannot change Him: “He abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself.” We do not put faith in our faith or in our feelings, because they will change and fail. We put our faith in Christ. The great missionary, J. Hudson Taylor, often said, “It is not by trying to be faithful, but in looking to the Faithful One, that we win the victory.”

### **3. The Athlete (2:5)**

Paul sometimes used athletic illustrations in his writings—wrestling, boxing, running, and exercising. The Greeks and the Romans were enthusiastic about sports, and the Olympic and Isthmian Games were important events to them. Paul had already urged Timothy to exercise like an athlete (1 Tim. 4:7–8). Now Paul admonished him to obey the rules.

A person who strives as an athlete to win a game and get a crown must be careful to obey all the rules of the game. In the Greek games in particular, the judges were most careful about enforcing the rules. Each competitor had to be a citizen of his nation, with a good reputation. In his preparations for the event, he had to follow specific standards. If an athlete was found defective in any matter, he was disqualified from competing. If, after he had competed and won, he was found to have broken some rule, he then lost his crown. Jim Thorpe, a great American athlete, lost his Olympic medals because he participated in sports in a way that broke an Olympic rule.

From the human point of view, Paul was a loser. There was nobody in the grandstands cheering him, for “all they which are in Asia” had turned away from him (2 Tim. 1:15). He was in prison, suffering

as an evildoer. Yet, Paul was a winner! He had kept the rules laid down in the Word of God, and one day he would get his reward from Jesus Christ. Paul was saying to young Timothy, “The important thing is that you obey the Word of God, no matter what people may say. You are not running the race to please people or to get fame. You are running to please Jesus Christ.”

### **4. The Farmer (2:6–7)**

This is another favorite image found in Paul’s letters. Paul once compared the local church to a cultivated field in which all the believers worked together (1 Cor. 3:5–9). Each Christian has his particular task to perform—plowing, sowing, watering, or harvesting—but it is God alone who gives the increase.

Several practical truths are found in this image of the farmer and field. For one thing, a farmer has to work. If you leave a field to itself, it will produce mostly weeds. Solomon had this truth in mind when he wrote about the field of the sluggard (Prov. 24:30–34). Real ministry is hard work, and pastors (and church members) ought to work in their spiritual fields as diligently as farmers work in their fields. Pastors do not punch clocks, but they ought to be up in the morning and at their work just as if God blew a whistle for them.

A farmer needs patience. “See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains” (James 5:7 NIV). A pastor friend of mine often reminds me, “The harvest is not the end of the meeting—it is the end of the age.”

A farmer deserves his share of the harvest. “The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops” (2 Tim. 2:6 NIV). Paul is stating here that a faithful pastor ought to be supported by his church. The same idea is found in 1 Corinthians 9:7, where Paul used a soldier, a farmer, and a herdsman to prove his point: “The labourer is worthy of his reward” (1 Tim. 5:18). Paul deliberately gave up his right to ask for support so that nobody could accuse him of using the gospel for personal gain (1 Cor. 9:14ff.). But this policy is not required for all of God’s servants.

As a local church grows and progresses, the people ought to faithfully increase their support of their pastors and other staff members. “If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we

reap a material harvest from you?” (1 Cor. 9:11 NIV). It is sad to see the way some local churches waste money and fail to care for their own laborers. God will honor a church that honors His faithful servants.

Something else is true in this image of the farmer: The spiritual leaders who share the Word with the people are the first ones to enjoy its blessings. The preacher and the teacher always get more out of the sermon or lesson than do the hearers because they put much more into it. They also get great joy out of seeing planted seeds bear fruit in the lives of others. Farming is hard work, and it can have many disappointments; but the rewards are worth it.

### **5. The Workman (2:14–18)**

The word study (2 Tim. 2:15) has nothing to do with books and teachers. It means “to be diligent, be zealous.” It is translated in this way in 2 Timothy 4:9, 21, and also in Titus 3:12. The emphasis in this paragraph is that the workman needs to be diligent in his labors so that he will not be ashamed when his work is inspected. “Rightly dividing” means “cutting straight” and can be applied to many different tasks: plowing a straight furrow, cutting a straight board, sewing a straight seam.

The pastor is a workman in God’s Word. The Word is a treasure that the steward must guard and invest. It is the soldier’s sword and the farmer’s seed. But it is also the workman’s tool for building, measuring, and repairing God’s people. The preacher and teacher who use the Word correctly will build their church the way God wants it to be built. But a sloppy worker will handle God’s Word deceitfully in order to make it say what he wants it to say (2 Cor. 4:2). When God tests our ministries in His local churches, some of it, sad to say, will become ashes (1 Cor. 3:10ff.).

An approved worker diligently studies the Word and seeks to apply it to his own life. An ashamed worker wastes his time with other “religious duties” and has little or nothing to give his class or congregation. An approved worker does not waste his time arguing about “words to no profit” (2 Tim. 2:14) because he knows that such arguing only undermines God’s work (see 1 Tim. 6:4; Titus 3:9).

An approved workman will shun “godless chatter” (2 Tim. 2:16 NIV; and see 1 Tim. 6:20), because he knows it only leads to more ungodliness. I fear that some “sharing times” do more harm than

good as well-meaning people exchange their “spiritual ignorance.”

An approved workman knows that false doctrine is dangerous, and he will oppose it. Paul compared it to gangrene (2 Tim. 2:17). Much as gangrene spreads, infects, and kills other tissue, so false doctrine spreads and infects the body of believers, the church. This infection must be exposed and removed. Only the “sound [healthy] doctrine” of the Word of God can keep a church healthy and growing.

Paul named two men who were false teachers, and he also identified their error. It is likely that the Hymenaeus named here (2 Tim. 2:17) is the same man named in 1 Timothy 1:20. We know nothing about his associate, Philetus. Both of them “wandered from the truth” by teaching that the resurrection had already taken place. Perhaps they taught that salvation is resurrection in a spiritual sense, so a believer must not expect a physical resurrection. But the denial of a physical resurrection is a serious thing (see 1 Cor. 15:12ff.), for it involves the resurrection of Christ and the completion of God’s plan of salvation for His people. No wonder these false teachers were able to “overthrow the faith of some” (2 Tim. 2:18). The resurrection is a foundational truth of the gospel.

Each of us as God’s workman will be either approved or ashamed. The word approved means “one who has been tested and found acceptable.” The word was used for testing and approving metals. Each trial that we go through forces us to study the Word to find God’s will. As we rightly use the Word, we succeed in overcoming our trials, and we are approved by God. Martin Luther once said that prayer, study, and suffering make a pastor; and this is true. We cannot be approved unless we are tested.

What does it mean to be “ashamed”? Certainly it means that such a workman’s work is below standard and cannot be accepted. It means loss of reward. In fact, in Paul’s day, a builder was fined if he failed to follow the specifications. When the Lord judges our works, it will be revealed whether we as workmen have handled the Word of God honestly and carefully. Some who are now first will end up last!

### **6. The Vessel (2:19–22)**

In this illustration, Paul described a “great house,” which is the professing church. The foundation of the house is safe and secure because God’s seal is on it. (In the Bible, a seal is a mark of ownership and security. No one would dare break a Roman seal.) Paul quoted Moses: “The LORD will shew who are his” (Num. 16:5). This refers to the Godward aspect of the Christian life: God chose us who trust Him as His elect (see 2 Tim. 2:10).

But there is also a manward aspect of the Christian life: “Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (2 Tim. 2:19). This refers back to Numbers 16:26, where the Lord warned the people to get away from the tents of Korah and the rebels. In other words, those who are the elect of God prove it by living godly lives. We are chosen in Christ “that we should be holy and without blame” (Eph. 1:4).

This great house not only has a solid foundation that is sealed, but it also has vessels (utensils of various kinds) for performing household functions. Paul divides the utensils into two categories: those of honor (gold and silver) and those of dishonor (wood and clay). He is not distinguishing between kinds of Christians, but rather is making a distinction between true teachers of the Word and the false teachers he described (2 Tim. 2:16–18). A faithful pastor is like a gold or silver vessel that brings honor to Jesus Christ. The head of a house displays his costliest and most beautiful utensils and gets honor from them. I remember the first time I viewed the crown jewels of England in the Tower of London, along with the priceless table vessels and utensils. I was overwhelmed with their glory and beauty. That is the kind of beauty God gives to his servants who faithfully handle the Word of God.

False teachers are not valuable; they are like wood and clay. They are utensils to dishonor, no matter how popular they may be today. Wood and clay will not survive the test of fire. It is worth noting that the name Timothy comes from two Greek words which together mean “God-honoring.” Paul was encouraging Timothy to live up to his name!

The important thing is that the honorable vessels not be contaminated by the dishonorable ones. The word these (2 Tim. 2:21) refers to the vessels of dishonor (2 Tim. 2:20). Paul was admonishing Timothy to separate himself from false teachers. If he did, then God would honor him, set him apart, and equip him for service. “Useful to the

Master” (2 Tim. 2:21 NIV)—what a tremendous honor that is! A useful human vessel of honor does not get involved in the popular things of the world, even the “religious world.” He must remain holy, and this means he must be separated from everything that would defile him.

This includes the sins of the flesh as well (2 Tim. 2:22). Paul used a similar admonition in 1 Timothy 6:11–12—“Flee ... follow ... fight.” True Bible separation is balanced: We flee sin, but we follow after righteousness. If we are not balanced, then we will be isolated instead of separated. In fact, God’s man Paul commanded us to fellowship “with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Tim. 2:22). After all, this is the purpose of the ministry of the Word (1 Tim. 1:5). It is sad when true believers are isolated because of a false view of separation.

For God to be able to use us as vessels, we must be empty, clean, and available. He will take us and fill us and use us for His glory. But if we are filled with sin or defiled by disobedience, He will first have to purge us, and that might not be an enjoyable experience. In the “great house” of the professing church, there are true believers and false. We must exercise spiritual discernment and be careful that we are vessels sanctified unto honor.

### **7. The Servant (2:23–26)**

“Servant” (2 Tim. 2:24) is the Greek word “doulos” which means “slave.” So Paul called himself “a slave of Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1). A slave had no will of his own; he was totally under the command of his master. Once, we Christians were the slaves of sin, but now we are the slaves of God (Rom. 6:16ff.). Like the servant in Old Testament days, we say, “I love my master ... I will not go out free” (Ex. 21:5).

God’s slave does not have an easy time teaching the Word. Satan opposes him and tries to trap his listeners (2 Tim. 2:26). Also, some people are just naturally difficult to teach. They enjoy “foolish and stupid arguments” (2 Tim. 2:23 NIV) and have no desire to feed on the nourishing Word of God. Until you have experienced it, you have no idea how difficult it is to impart spiritual truth to some people.

How easy it would be to ignore them! But then Satan would get them. Paul admonished Timothy to avoid the arguments that create strifes, but not to ignore the people. He must not argue or

fight. He must be patient and gentle, teaching the Word of God in meekness. It is not enough just to expose error and refute it; we must also teach positive truths and establish the saints in faith.

A servant of God must instruct those who oppose him, for this is the only way he can rescue them from Satan's captivity. Satan is a liar (John 8:44). He captures people by his lying promises, as he did Eve (see Gen. 3; 2 Cor. 11:3). A servant's purpose is not to win arguments but to win souls. He wants to see deceived persons brought to repentance ("I was wrong—I have changed my mind") and the acknowledging of the truth.

The word recover (2 Tim. 2:26) describes a man coming out of a drunken stupor. Satan makes people drunk with his lies, and the servant's task is to sober them up and rescue them. The last phrase in 2 Timothy 2:26 can be interpreted three ways: (1) they are delivered from the snare of the Devil who took them captive to do his will; (2) they are taken captive by God's servant to do God's will; (3) they are delivered out of the snare of the Devil, who took them captive, to do God's will. I prefer the third interpretation.

As you survey these seven aspects of the work of the ministry, you can see how important and how demanding a work it is. The ministry is no place for a loafer because it demands discipline and work. It is no place for a shirker because there are enemies to fight and tasks to be completed.

Church members need to pray for their pastors and encourage them in the work of the Lord. Church officers should faithfully do their work so that the pastors can devote themselves to their own ministry (see Acts 6:1–7). Churches should provide enough financial support for the ministers so that they can fully devote themselves to the work of the ministry.

In other words, ministers and members should labor together in the work of the Lord.

*Taken from: BE FAITHFUL by Warren W. Wiersbe;  
Published by David C. Cook, 4050 Lee Vance View,  
Colorado Springs, CO 80918 U.S.A. All rights  
reserved. Except for brief excerpts for review  
purposes, no part of this book may be reproduced  
or used in any form without written permission  
from the publisher.*