

Commended to God and the Word of His Grace

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Two Things That Cannot Be Ruined

Acts 20:32 contains Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders — likely the last time he saw them before his imprisonment and death. He had warned them that after his departure grievous wolves would enter, not sparing the flock, and that from among their own number men would arise speaking perverse things to draw disciples after them. And then he said: I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

Two things and only two: God, and the word of His grace. Paul knew that ruin was coming. He had already written that all they in Asia had turned away from him — from his doctrine, the doctrine of the one body and the head in heaven. The testimony was already beginning to be ruined. But those two things — God and His word — cannot be ruined. Men have tried to destroy the word of God more than once. Voltaire was determined to eliminate it; his house became a Bible distribution centre after his death. The word stands. And God is immutable. Neither can be touched.

That is the foundation on which Paul commended these beloved ones. Not a lengthy programme, not a list of things to do. Just these two realities that do not change and cannot be destroyed, and that are able to do what nothing else can: build up and give an inheritance. That is enough. It was enough then. It is enough now.

I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. — Acts 20:32

Be Strong in the Grace That Is in Christ Jesus

Second Timothy 2 is one of the last things Paul wrote, from prison in Rome. Timothy was a young man with a heart like the apostle's — the one Paul said he had no one like-minded, who genuinely cared for the state of the believers. And Paul's opening word to him in this chapter is: be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Grace is in Christ Jesus. That is where it lives. That is where it is secure. Everything that is in Christ Jesus is unassailable — we are accepted in the Beloved, we are in Him, we cannot be taken out of Him. The salvation which is in Christ Jesus comes, Paul writes in verse 10, with eternal glory. That is an expression found nowhere else: salvation with eternal glory. Can that be undone? Nothing that is in Christ Jesus can be undone. So this is not a summons to manufacture strength out of our own resources. It is a direction to draw on what is already secure, already there, already ours in Him.

Everything that follows in the chapter — the soldier, the athlete, the husbandman, the workman — flows from this starting point. All the doing, all the endurance, all the faithful service, can only be what it should be if it comes from that place of grace. Not from duty, not from fear of consequence, not from the desire to be seen or approved — but from grace. God's free favour, His unmerited kindness, already lavished on us and secure in Christ.

The Soldier, the Athlete, the Farmer, the Workman

Second Timothy 2 presents several images for what the Christian life involves. The soldier endures hardness and entangles himself with nothing of this life, so

that he may please the one who has chosen him to be a soldier. The purpose of a soldier's life is to please his commanding officer — not to accumulate personal advantages, but to be at the disposal of the one he serves. No man entangled in civilian affairs can give that attention to his commander.

The athlete strives lawfully — he does not cut across the field, does not use what is prohibited, keeps to the rules of the contest. There is a way to run that will be disqualified, and a way that will be crowned. The crown comes only to those who strive lawfully. The farmer labours hard and is the first to partake of the fruits. His work and his reward are directly connected. And the workman in verse 15 rightly divides the word of truth — cuts in a straight line, does not wander off on tangents, handles the word with the precision of a skilled craftsman.

These are not easy things. They are all hard work. But they are all grounded in the grace that is in Christ Jesus — not in the energy of the flesh, which cannot produce any of them genuinely. The flesh can imitate a soldier, an athlete, a farmer, a workman. It cannot produce the real thing. Only grace can.

Remember Jesus Christ — Raised from the Dead

In the middle of all these practical instructions, a call to remember: remember Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, raised from the dead, according to my gospel. This is not incidental. In a passage full of things to do, Paul inserts this as the essential thing to hold onto. Remember Him. Remember the resurrection.

All other religious founders are in a tomb. The Lord Jesus is not. He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father because death had no claim on Him — He was holy, He had glorified the Father in every detail of His life and death, and the grave could not hold Him. He is now seated at the right hand of the Father, alive forever. That is the ground of everything. If Christ is not raised, our faith is vain. But He is raised, and that is not a fact about the past only — it is the living reality of now. He ever lives to make intercession.

When we are unfaithful — and Peter is the great example, denying the Lord three times — He abideth faithful. He cannot deny Himself. That does not give licence to unfaithfulness. It gives comfort in repentance. The Lord who was faithful to Peter after his denial, restoring him and entrusting to him the keys of the kingdom, is faithful to us. The foundation stands sure: the Lord knoweth them that are His.

The Temple of the Lord — Pride of Position, and Hezekiah's Heart

Jeremiah 7 contains a word for Israel that had profound meaning in its day and has its echo in our own. The people were saying, Jehovah's temple, Jehovah's temple, Jehovah's temple is this — as though the mere existence of the temple guaranteed God's approval of their condition. But the Lord through Jeremiah told them: amend your ways and your doings. The temple was real. It was His. But the pride of position that said we have the temple had replaced the reality of walking with Him.

First Corinthians 3:16 says that the assembly — every believer on earth — is the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in them. That is true. It is declared by God and therefore certain. But the testimony of that reality has been ruined. When we look at the divided state of professing Christianity today — two thousand denominations, each going its own way — it does not look like one temple, one body, one head. The ruin is real. But God's declaration does not change.

Hezekiah understood this. In 2 Chronicles 30, when Israel had been divided for generations, when the northern tribes had set up their own temples at Dan and Bethel as a convenience — he sent couriers to all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, inviting them to come to Jerusalem for the Passover. Most mocked the messengers. But some from Asher and Manasseh and Zebulun humbled themselves and came. A handful. And the Passover was held, and those who

came were changed: they rose up and removed the idols from Jerusalem and cast them into the Kidron.

Certain of Asher and Manasseh and Zebulon humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. — 2 Chronicles 30:11

That is our position. Not the vast bulk of Christendom, which has found its own convenience and its own way, but a few who have humbled themselves to be where God has said His name is, to break bread as the early believers broke bread, to gather simply to remember the Lord. It is not respectability that brings us here. It is not a large building or a professional program or a comprehensive ministry offering. It is the Lord Himself in the midst. And the Father seeks worshippers — those who worship in spirit and in truth. That is what He wants, and that is what this is: a few humbled ones who have come to Jerusalem.

Strong in the Grace — Our Only Safety

Coming back to where we began: the God of grace, and the word of His grace. Those are the two things man cannot destroy and that alone can build up and give an inheritance. Everything else — the testimony, the gathering, the various forms of service — these can be ruined and have been ruined by man's self-will and failure. But God and His word remain.

Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Hold onto what cannot be shaken. Commend yourselves and one another to God and to the word of His grace. Strive lawfully, endure hardship, labour as the farmer labours, handle the word as the skilled workman handles his tools. Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead. And lean on the faithfulness of the one who abideth faithful, who cannot deny Himself, whose foundation stands sure.
