

10,1,26 2 Tim. 2:1-7, The Message of the “Unknown Overcomer”

(vs's 1-2) You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

The first two verses remind Timothy (and us) that our strength to accomplish God's purpose for us (whether individual or related to the Church) is a strength that comes through grace. In the writings of the New Testament where we have the explanation of the Age we are living in, there is not one word in everything we see that is emphasized more than the word “grace”.

At any point in our lives when confusion sets in (and there seems to be an infinite number of those) and we feel we've lost contact with what this is all about and how God's will can be accomplished in vessels as weak as we are, Paul would advise us to immediately drop back to what we understand of the meaning of grace.

I'm working on something that won't be finalized until later in October. It's going to include segments of an epistle that has, as its purpose, the goal of not only distinguishing between the Old and New Covenants, but of also giving as thorough an explanation as possible of what grace is and why it's the major theme underlying everything that involves the dispensation we are living in.

In reality, our understanding and application of the meaning and implications of grace as the governing principle of our lives as members of this new creation, is, above *everything* else, the one thing we need most to have clear in our thoughts. We are saved by grace and we are to grow in grace and the knowledge of Christ.

But, like I said, since we'll go into greater detail on this in few weeks, for now I just need to stress it's importance as a reason for why Paul ties grace into the strength we all need to not only complete our own journey, but it's also the only thing that ensures that what we have learned can be successfully passed on (Quote) “to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

Strength, which could also be translated “power”, if it comes to us from the Lord instead of our own extremely limited resources, it will be the kind of power that accomplishes God's purpose for us. And the good news is that, from our side, this

grace-imparted strength is only dependent on our cooperation, our faith and trust in God to give us what's needed for each of us to play our part in the overall completion of God's ultimate purpose.

For those under Law, the responsibility rests on their shoulders, but under grace, God undertakes on our behalf.

(Heb. 13:20-21) May the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever.

(Col. 1:29) To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

(Eph. 3:20-21) To Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.

(1 Cor. 15:10) By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

(2 Cor. 3:4-5) We have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.

(2 Cor. 12:7-10) A thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, most gladly I will rather (gratefully embrace) in my infirmities, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, that is when I am strong.

See what I mean? It's everywhere; it's *the* covering principle of life in Christ.

Somehow, we have to grab hold of that kind of mindset in our approach to everything that comes our way. Since there is no place for passivity in the Christian life, we can *actively* move into what we believe is God's will, trusting that we will have His strength, through grace, through "unmerited favor", to do what we're asked to do.

Some of the key meanings that come from all this is that God works on our hearts giving us the desire to do His will and the strength we need, while keeping us in a place of extreme personal weakness, so we realize (in looking back) that grace was what accomplished what we never could. We are simply meant to be vessels the Lord can use to demonstrate His glory.

(Phil. 2:13) It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

So, again, Paul starts this section of Timothy reminding him that Timothy will get nowhere in obeying all the exhortations Paul had given him, and neither will those Timothy passes these things onto, unless everyone involved understands the underlying meaning of those verses I just read.

Now, in the next few verses, Paul breaks down some of the life-applications of all this – things we will need to accept and anticipate if we decide to go on with the Lord. Do we really want to follow Christ, or are we 'rich young rulers' unwilling to count the cost? If we're serious, it will involve personally, daily, stepping onto a path characterized by conflict and pressure.

(2 Tim. 2:3-7) You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. And also, if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops. Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.

I need to read (actually re-read) a small part of something I shared a few weeks ago because it speaks directly to this issue of what our focus is to be as servants of God.

It also helps us understand the delicate balance we have to face when we are required to live in this world, but at the same time, we're to be completely given over to service to the Lord. How do we give everything we have to that service and still do what we need to do to function in this world without being "entangled in the affairs of this life"?

William Carey, often called the father of modern missions, was a shoe cobbler by trade before he went to India. He kept a map of India in his shop, stopping every so often to study and pray over it. Sometimes, because of his preaching ministry, his shoe business suffered. One day a friend admonished him for neglecting his business. "Neglecting my business?" said Carey, looking at him intently. "My business is to extend the kingdom of God. I only cobble shoes to pay expenses." No matter what your occupation, every Christian should have Carey's mentality: "My real business is to extend God's kingdom; I just work to pay expenses."

This is all very personal, meaning that each of us has to pray to find that balance for ourselves between serving the Lord with all our heart and simultaneously functioning in this world until we leave it.

These verses in 2 Tim. 2 are only addressed to sincere disciples of Christ, not born-again believers whose commitment to the Lord is limited and conditional. Only those who lose their lives, find them. Because of that, Paul draws on illustrations of warfare, athletics and farming. Wars can be won or lost; we can fail or win in athletic contests and farmers can thrive or starve.

It helps knowing that it will be "grace", not "Law", that sustains us and that our faith can rest on the Lord, not on us; but in each of these illustrations, Paul makes it clear that there are rules; (vs. 5), "If anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules."

To be saved, we don't have to compete at all. In relation to salvation, grace means that all we are asked to do is trust Him and He will save us – and that's an eternal transaction that nothing can break; it's unconditional.

But we weren't saved just for the sake of avoiding hell; we were saved with a very specific purpose that God had in mind and there are some within the Body of Christ who genuinely desire to both understand and move fully into the accomplishment of that purpose. In the Old Testament, for Israel, the purpose was the possession of Canaan and only a remnant of those who were saved accomplished that purpose.

In the New Testament, the purpose is conformity to Christ (Rom. 8:9), or as Paul puts it in Gal. 4:19; "That Christ be fully formed in us". God original plan for humanity was to have a race of humans made in His image (Gen. 1:26). He has never abandoned that plan. After the fall occurred, God has been working throughout history to recover what was lost and establish the finished product by the time of the closing of the Millennial Kingdom and then enjoy the full reality of that original plan for all of the eternal ages to come.

In each dispensation and each generation of history from Genesis to the end of Revelation, those living during those time periods have a very specific role to play in this recovery process.

For us, living in the Church Age, pursuing that purpose will not only involve keeping the rules of the contest, it will involve what Paul calls "hardship" (2 Tim. 2:3). For those who enlist with a serious intent of going as far as the Lord is willing to take them in terms of spiritual growth, the New Testament calls these people "overcomers" as over against, (as mentioned earlier), those whose desire is to be saved, but they either don't have, or don't want a full understanding of this life and God's desire for us, so they content themselves with participation in the Christian religion and the knowledge that they have escaped condemnation.

In the Old Testament, those who fully committed to the Lord were identified as "the remnant"; in the Age of the Church, they are identified as "overcomers". In both cases, they are an extreme minority within a much larger company of God's people.

Paul is correctly assuming that Timothy genuinely desires to be among those who are overcomers and who will, by God's grace, make a valuable contribution in their lifetimes to the fulfillment of God's original purpose for humanity.

I want to use a familiar Old Testament story that shows how anyone who desires to be in God's purpose for them, can be. They don't have to be king, a high priest, or a prophet; they just have to give themselves to whatever the Lord wants them to do. Being an overcomer is based on what we'll see in this story, it's *not* based on popularity or having a global impact ministry.

To introduce this, I'll start with something I noticed recently that put some things I've wondered about for a long time in perspective. I think most evangelical pastors have adopted either the verse-by-verse or a random topical approach to Sunday's sermons. But it just kind of hit me that the majority of the New Testament epistles (which were basically *written* sermons)- all have one thing in common, even though the topics were often different; they all addressed the spiritual condition of the church they were written to, with doctrinal summaries included to show the tie-in between Truth and the apparent reality of a particular church.

And those messages or epistles did two things consistently – they commended what was happening in the church that was good and they addressed things that needed to be changed; which makes sense, because just giving people knowledge for knowledge's sake without tying it directly into the life and actual condition of that church seems very limited if you really want to help the church move forward.

As we've seen before, this pattern is especially true in the letters in Rev. 2 & 3. But what struck me is that this is also true with the majority of the other epistles in the New Testament. I don't think any of that is a coincidence. It appears that pastors are expected to know the spiritual condition of their congregations and be able and willing to teach them what they need *most* to hear – encouragement for the things that need to continue and correction if the pastor sees danger in some form creeping in. A good shepherd carries both a staff and a rod; one is for guidance and rescue, the other is for correction or discipline.

But I can't remember any time in the last 30-40 years when I've heard a Sunday message that followed that pattern. So, either pastors now are just going verse-by-verse assuming that at some point they'll magically hit on what some of what their people need to know, or the pastors don't know the spiritual condition of their people and might not be able to address it if they did.

I can see a huge advantage for God's people when those leading them are teaching what their people need to hear in the present, so they can make any adjustments needed to either get to, or stay on, the right path.

I'm sure that any teaching of God's Word can be fruitful and can touch someone hearing it, but if the pastor could see, and was addressing real life situations that characterized the church as a whole, the advantage for those with an ear to hear what the Spirit is saying would be immense. I would love to have someone tell me the pros and cons of my own condition spiritually; to have someone show me what God sees, and I hope I'd respond and make any changes needed.

But we all know the saying – 'be careful what you wish for'.

I trust that the Lord will give me these kinds of insights in my personal studies and also guide me to the right books and podcasts to listen to. But to be a part of a fellowship that is consistently, faithfully, being held to the path the Lord has for them, seems to be the pattern or tactic that those in leadership in the first century followed; at least that's one of the things that jumps out to me when I think about the specifics of what each of the New Testament letters is focused on. The writers are addressing current, real-life situations and issues that had direct application to the church they were writing to.

Now, if we expand that to include our generation, it means that if the Lord had freedom, because of the openness of His people, to bring *His* message to them just as He did in Rev. 2 & 3, what would we be hearing from the pulpits in 2026? Remember, those letters in Revelation were addressed to the "messenger", the pastor, of the church, and he was expected to take the information he was given and pass it along to his congregation.

That has to be a major part of any pastoral responsibility – to hear what the Spirit is saying now, at this time, and then to make sure the people are fully aware of what that is.

Ok, back to the ‘non-famous’ overcomers. It’s a battle to look at this objectively, because we all have a tendency to evaluate the value of someone or something by standards used by the world, not by God’s standards.

We’ve all heard of Nehemiah and we probably know his story, so just to summarize; God wanted Israel back in their land. They had been exiled to Babylon, but it was time to free them and to recover what they’d lost. There were others involved in this plan of God for His people, like Zerubbabel and Ezra; and of course, King Artaxerxes supported Israel’s return, but for our purpose tonight, I want to focus on Nehemiah because he was a complete unknown.

The scriptures don’t tell us anything about him except that he was “the son of Hakaliah”. He had a job as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes (in other words, he served wine to the king, but tasted it first to make sure it wasn’t poisoned).

The point being, Nehemiah wasn’t a king or a prophet, he was just an ordinary 9 to 5’r that knew what God wanted to do in his generation and he committed to it. There’s the first identifier of an overcomer – it’s someone who knows what God wants to do in this world and with His people at this particular time in history, and he goes for it.

Every generation in the Church Age is unique, and besides the general calling of the Church for the whole dispensation of bringing the gospel to the lost and doing what we can to help other Christians grow spiritually, there is also something specific and unique that God has in mind that applies *only* to that generation.

Since the overcomer is a person who has an ear to hear what the Spirit is saying, he becomes a member of a spiritual remnant that can see, and is willing to commit to what the majority of Christians can’t see, let alone commit to, because it’s specific for that time only, and only those who are truly listening will hear the Spirit’s voice and know what to do.

I found a description of this contrast in one of Spark’s articles;

Many of those written about in God's Word would never have been mentioned or had any place, but for this particular purpose of God in their time. You may put yourself in such a category, I think we are all there. And naturally we may count for little or nothing; we may never come to anything at all. The majority of us would not be anything, of any account at all in life, or of little account in life; we spend our life, do our work, perhaps do a lot of good things, pass on, and that is the end of the story so far as our lives here are concerned. It's bound to be like that unless we are linked in by Divine sovereignty to our committal to the one thing that God has in view in our day.

Let there be no mistaking it: God has a purpose in our day. God is committed to a thing very near to His heart, in our time. And our value, our place in Divine records, our name, our history, our significance, is going to be entirely governed by this: to what extent have we served the purpose of God in our day and in our generation. To be so linked in with the Lord is to give to people a significance beyond anything that would obtain otherwise. Now, you see, this is the situation: God wills that this work should be done. God willed and purposed that what certain people came to do should be done in their time- there's no doubt about it, that was God's purpose for them in their time.

A few months ago, I touched on this idea by using John the Baptist. I asked us to imagine John the Baptist moving out into his ministry teaching Exodus or Leviticus because that's where the Mosaic Covenant began. Seems like it would be a good idea to remind Israel of their roots.

Normally, that *would* be a good idea; it just wouldn't have been God's idea. Since John understood the time he was living in, he knew exactly what God's people needed to hear; and it wasn't an exposition of Leviticus.

So, what did God want John to do? Proclaim the arrival of the Messiah and teach those parts of the Bible that would prepare His people spiritually for His coming.

It's true that studying Leviticus would be teaching God's Word to God's people.; but John didn't do that.

When Christ came, the rabbis were teaching the Old Testament scriptures every Sabbath. But that's not what either John or Jesus were doing. They had a message that dealt directly with what God's people needed to know at that time in history.

That's not happening any more. There *is absolutely* a message for our generation and it's the most important message the Church needs to hear at this time in history, but neither the Sunday pulpits nor the prophesy experts are giving that message to the Body of Christ.

So, now it's 2026, the only way we can know what the Church needs to hear is if we know *the Biblical implications* of being at this time in history.

Why aren't most pastors and podcasters proclaiming the message that the church universal needs most to hear at this time? Because these individuals are heads of Christian organizations with a verse-by-verse or a news-headline agenda that they believe is what God wants most for us. It isn't, but they think it is, and that's partly because that is what the people want to hear;

(2 Tim. 4:3-4) The time will come (*has come*) when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth.

Even the 'prophecy podcasters' are only giving us some of the signs or foreshadowings of the Second Coming. They aren't preparing the church spiritually to meet Christ face-to-face at the rapture let alone at the Bema Seat. And I've noticed that when they tangent off into doctrine and theology, most of what we're hearing are misinterpretations of the scriptures; what Paul would call "false doctrines", which Paul said would be typical of the End Times; of *our* time. While they are teaching prophecy, they are also fulfilling it.

So, the pastors and podcasters, in order to keep the people happy, the churches full, and the money flowing, are telling them what they want to hear. And they are

doing that faithfully, every week, just as the rabbi's did in the generation of Christ's first coming.

With men like Nehemiah, the focus of his message wasn't general, it was specific, because God's focus in their time was specific. There's obviously no harm in teaching any part of God's Word because everything we learn of Christ moves us closer to conformity to His image. But along with the principles and truths that renew our minds and protect us from deception, there has always been, in each generation, a torch we are to carry, a message we are commit to, even unto death if necessary. And as we saw earlier from Sparks;

Our value, our place in Divine records, our name, our history, our significance, is going to be entirely governed by this one thing; to what extent have we served the *specific* purpose of God for our day and in our generation.

In our relationships with the lost, we are testing the waters for openness and interest, and then explaining the way of eternal Life in Christ to them. And in our relationships with our brothers and sisters, we're meant to be bringing God's highest-priority message to them.

We don't have to minister to thousands of people, lost or saved; this has never been a numbers game. As we do whatever we need to do each week to make ends meet, God will sovereignly provide opportunities for us to plant seeds in the hearts of the lost and to bring a degree of spiritual awakening to those believers who are genuinely seeking answers to what God is doing in our time.

For those among us who are seeing more clearly what God's message and activity in our time is all about, and are committing themselves to co-labor with Him in prayer and service to support and be a part of His work, He will honor that commitment with increased clarity and strength, just as He has *always* done for those who have aligned themselves with His purpose.

Timothy was told to "guard" the truth that was committed to him and to teach it faithfully. Satan's greatest desire is to move all of us away from the Truth, so

naturally, those who refuse to move away are going to suffer what all faithful spiritual soldiers suffer when they are in the heat of battle.

Others will call us obsessed and imbalanced, many may abandon us, and the reality is that *no one* who stays true to God's purpose for our time will be popular. But if we're willing, even in our personal limitations, God will allow us to stand alongside the Holy Spirit's current effort in our generation to prepare men and women for the soon appearance of Christ for all who have ears to hear. Like Paul told the Thessalonians, ". . . let us not sleep, as do others."

The time is short and most Christians will be like those who questioned Nehemiah's obsession with returning to Jerusalem and re-building the wall. They didn't see what Nehemiah saw; they didn't realize what time it was or what to do about it. They didn't want to rock the boat or endure what the enemy would bring against them if they persisted in proclaiming the Truth.

In the beginning of our study tonight I intentionally spent time on the reality of grace being that which carries us. When we studied Revelation, we saw in chapter three with the church at Philadelphia that (quote) "having little strength" is normal for those who are going on with the Lord unto full stature.

God weakens us so that we are desperately dependent on Him for every step we take and every word we speak. That's why Paul wrote this to the self-sufficient Corinthians;

(1 Cor. 2:3,5) I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling . . . so that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

"Weakness, fear and trembling" are what characterized the greatest of the apostles. It may seem paradoxical with the courage, faithfulness and endurance that we know Paul also embodied. But it makes perfect sense to those who have experienced the inner working of the Cross breaking their self-dependence through suffering in order to cast them on Christ as their only hope of glory.

God has freedom to express Himself in people like that, so for those willing, He will take them there. Those are our overcomers – it's the meek who inherit the earth.

All those passages I read at the beginning about God working in us; about grace being the one thing we can all count on if we intend to walk with the Lord; that was Paul's foundation for all the other exhortations he gave to Timothy.

We are called to represent Christ, not Christianity, and that means communicating His personal message to this generation. God wants us to tell the Truth, both to the lost and the saved. He is recovering what has been lost and seeking to unify the vision of all His people; to take all the splintered parts and doctrinal theories of a million divisions and bring them together under the canopy of Truth that would motivate us to share a global message of grace and destiny to all who will listen.

He knows exactly what He intends to accomplish at the end of this Age and He is offering each of us a small part in the full realization of His will, His purpose, for our time.

We have spent a great deal of time over the last few months attempting to identify and clarify the message God wants proclaimed from the pulpits of every church in the world. For many of us, whether we focus on the issue of "soul vs. spirit", or on God's ultimate goal and desire of having a Co-regent to rule with His Son over creation, or the need for Christians to understand the once-hidden mystery of the new creation and the implications of being a part of that new humanity – wherever we go and whatever we learn, I know that to some extent we are still "seeing men like trees walking".

As time slips by, for many of us, there is almost a desperation in our hearts to see more clearly what is often still somewhat unclear at present. I personally believe that that desperation is divinely intentional. In the workings of God in the souls of His people, He has determined that *His response to our hunger for the Truth is in direct proportion to the intensity of that hunger* (repeat).

(Jer. 29:13) You will seek me and you will find me when you seek me with *all* your heart.

The Lord knows that the only thing which can ensure our faithfulness and endurance in the battle we are in is a knowledge that is much deeper than that which comes from a purely academic approach to the scriptures. There is nothing

more effective than suffering to drive us to our knees for answers. When our sweat falls to the ground like great drops of blood, there is no longer any doubt as to how seriously we are taking what God has spoken to us.

So, it's imperative that we present our bodies as a living sacrifice, taking our own hands off our future and allowing the Lord full freedom to do as He wills with us knowing, by faith, that whatever He does will be coming from a completely unselfish heart that cares only for our good.

And just to make sure we close with a strong reminder of the implications of what it means to approach all we've looked at through the lens of God's grace, I'll leave you with some comments on this by Watchman Nee;

Living in the Spirit means that I trust the Holy Spirit to do in me that which I cannot do myself. This is completely different than the life I would naturally live of myself. Each time I am faced with a new demand from the Lord, I look to Him to do in me what He requires of me. It is not a case of trying, but of trusting; not of struggling, but of resting in Him.