

The good confession

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The testimony of Timothy

In the course of his *second* missionary journey, the apostle Paul, accompanied by Silas, visited Derbe and Lystra in the province of Lycaonia. Here they encountered a young man named Timothy. The brethren in Lystra and Iconium spoke well of Timothy because of his faith and his ministry in the region. Paul commissioned Timothy to travel with him throughout Asia and to do the work of an evangelist. Act 16:1-3. 2Ti 4:5.

Prior to this, Timothy, with his mother and his grandmother, had come to know the Lord through the ministry of Paul and Barnabas on their *first* missionary journey. Timothy's testimony among the brethren of Lycaonia revealed that he had received Paul's exhortation to give attention to the doctrines that Jesus had taught, particularly those that accorded with godliness. Timothy had been urged to consent to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to conform himself to a godly life. Godly living became the definition of Timothy's faith. By receiving the instruction of Paul, Timothy understood that those who stray from godliness stray from the faith. 1Ti 6:10.

Timothy had been called by God to inherit eternal life. The call to lay hold of eternal life placed him in a conflict. This conflict is, in fact, common to all believers. Paul noted this in his letter to the Hebrews, writing, 'But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle [or conflict] with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated.' Heb 10:32-33.

In the midst of this conflict, Timothy needed to fight the good fight of faith and, through faith, succeed to inherit eternal life. 1Ti 6:12. There were enemies that needed to be overcome. Desire and temptation were snares that needed to be avoided. 1Ti 6:9. Foolish and harmful lusts, including the desire for riches, were like quicksand, which drowned men in destruction and perdition. 1Ti 6:9-10. Furthermore, there were many, so called 'teachers' who peddled false doctrines concerning the way to eternal life. Paul said that these false teachers were full of pride, but knew nothing. He described them as being 'obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain'. 1Ti 6:4-5.

Discernment and spiritual wisdom were needed by Timothy to avoid these pitfalls. He obtained these capacities by taking heed to Paul's instructions, and was able to confess the good confession of faith in the presence of many witnesses. Rom 10:17. Col 2:7. 1Ti 6:12. This is why many believers in the province of Lycaonia testified to his commitment and godliness. Act 16:2. For Timothy, the good fight of faith, and the good confession, were one and the same. It was the attainment of godliness in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

Importantly, Paul described the confession of faith as ‘the good confession’ that Jesus witnessed before Pontius Pilate. 1Ti 6:13. When Jesus was brought before Pilate, He declared that His kingdom was not of this world. Joh 18:36. Moreover, in response to Pilate’s query, ‘Are You a king?’ Jesus said, ‘You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, *that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.*’ Joh 18:37.

The confession of faith is the testimony of a son of God who is a member of the body of Christ. In the same manner as Jesus, they do not live by the principles of this world, because they belong to the kingdom of God. Joh 3:5. They are citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. Heb 12:22. In the fellowship of Christ’s offering and sufferings, they are being delivered from the lie that Satan fathered within mankind as another law. Rom 7:23. Instead of living by this fallen principle, they are being established in the truth. This is because they hear, believe and obey the voice of Christ.

The pastoral epistles

Not long before he was martyred in Rome, Paul sent two letters to Timothy and a letter to another disciple named Titus. These three letters are commonly referred to as ‘the pastoral epistles’. They contain Paul’s final instructions to Timothy and Titus, which were an apostolic charge, or commandment, that they were to obey and implement among the churches. In obedience to these commands, they were to continue the work of apostolic administration as overseers in the body of Christ. This was to be a feature of their good confession of faith.

To execute this charge, Timothy was urged by Paul to follow the example of Christ’s faithful obedience to God the Father. He said, ‘I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords.’ 1Ti 6:13-15.

Having already demonstrated the good confession, Timothy was to *keep* Paul’s commandments *without spot and blameless* until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is, he was to *continue* to pursue godliness. 1Ti 6:11. Evidently, the commandments contained in Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus describe how a person of faith walks and ministers in the church in a manner that is without spot and blameless. This is fundamental to the effective ministry of an overseer, or *watchman*.

The watchmen

Overseers are slaves of Christ who have been set as stewards over His house. They have received ascension gift grace from Christ – some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastor-teachers – to equip every person in the body for the work of their ministry by feeding them with the word of present truth. Eph 4:11-12. Luk 12:42.

The Scriptures also refer to overseers as ‘watchmen’. For example, when the Lord commissioned Ezekiel as a prophet, He said to him, ‘Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me.’ Eze 3:17. As a watchman, Ezekiel was to warn the wicked to turn from their wicked ways. He was also required to warn the righteous about the stumbling block that the Lord had placed in front of them because they had turned from righteousness to

iniquity. If the wicked or the righteous perished in their sin because of the watchman's failure to warn them, the blood of those who perished was required at the hand of the watchman. Eze 3:17-21.

Through the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord said to His covenant people, 'Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find *rest for your souls*. But they said, "We will not walk in it." Also, I set watchmen over you, saying, "Listen to the sound of the trumpet!" But they said, "We will not listen".' Jer 6:16-17. Jesus also spoke about finding rest for our souls. He declared, 'Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and *I will give you rest*. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will *find rest for your souls*. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.' Mat 11:28-30. We see that we are yoked to Christ by hearing the message proclaimed by His watchmen, and by walking in the pathway that their word reveals. This pathway is our participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering. Yoked to Christ in this fellowship, we find rest for our soul.

Watch and pray

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was manifest as the Shepherd and Overseer, or Watchman, of our souls. 1Pe 2:25. He specifically called Peter, James and John to join Him in this work of overseership when He asked them to *watch and pray with Him*.

Mat 26:36-41. As He prayed to the Father, by the Holy Spirit, Jesus received strength to overcome temptation and the powers of darkness that were arrayed against Him, and were seeking His destruction. Likewise, Jesus called His disciples to watch and pray so that they would avoid the temptation to draw back from the fellowship of His offering and to walk according to the flesh. Mat 26:41.

This fellowship of prayer in Gethsemane was foundational to the disciples' participation in Christ's offering and sufferings. It was also essential to their capacity to make a good confession before men as witnesses of Christ's death and resurrection. This is true for all those whom the Lord has called to serve as overseers in His house. Making this point, Jesus said to the presbytery of the church in Sardis, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. *Be watchful*, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. *Therefore if you will not watch*, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.' Rev 3:1-3.

Although Christ was specifically addressing the presbytery of Sardis, His warning applies to the whole church. He says to us all, 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says *to the churches*.' Rev 3:6. Our capacity to watch and pray with Christ *depends* upon receiving and obeying the word that is proclaimed from the presbytery by watchmen. As the apostle John declared, 'That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.' 1Jn 1:3.

'Watching and praying' means remembering how we have received and heard the word, holding fast to this word, and repenting. Rev 3:3. As we do this, we are able to 'strengthen the things which remain'. 'The things which remain' refers to the substance of our sonship that we have received from the Father, in Christ, by the Holy Spirit. Php 3:12-15. Our sonship is strengthened as we, in our weakness, remain joined to the fellowship of

Christ's offering and sufferings. We are strengthened by His *exanastasis* life that is given to us in this fellowship. Php 2:10-11. As Jesus said to Paul regarding the sufferings that he was experiencing, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' 2Co 12:9.

If we do not meditate on the word that Christ is ministering to the church through His messengers, we are unable to watch and pray, and our works are not perfect before God. This means that we are not without spot; nor are we blameless before the Lord. Instead, our priestly garments are 'spotted with the flesh'. Jud 1:23. Moreover, our bodies are filthy in the sight of the Lord because we endeavour to walk according to our own fallen, or fleshly, understanding. In this deluded condition, we are disconnected from Christ and are at risk of having our names blotted out from the Book of Life. Rev 3:5.

Washing our bodies and our garments

Concluding His letter to Sardis, Jesus Christ made this promise: 'He who *overcomes* shall be *clothed in white garments*, and *I will not blot out his name* from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.' Rev 3:5. We overcome by participating in the process through which our priestly garments are made white, and we are sanctified as a son of God.

Our priestly garments are made white as they are washed in the blood of the Lamb through our fellowship in the sufferings of Christ. Rev 7:14. The apostle Paul described this process as 'having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience'. Heb 10:22. When our conscience is cleansed, our motive for service as a priest is being made pure. We are delivered from the desire to define our own service according to the knowledge of good and evil. To have our garments washed in the blood of the Lamb qualifies us to serve God as priests and defines us as being 'without fault'. However, our participation in this priestly work is dependent upon having our bodies washed with pure water.

Our name is confessed by Christ before the Father when our bodies are washed by the pure water of the word. Heb 10:22. This is the word of God's covenant, which proclaims our sonship. It is the water from the laver which is set in the outer court of the true tabernacle in heaven. The outer court is on the earth, where Christ suffered. Rev 11:1-3,8. Rev 15:2-4. Heb 13:12. This affirms that the water of the word, which has the power to cleanse and sanctify those who receive it, is ministered by presbyteries on earth. When our bodies are washed by this word, we are being sanctified to our name as a son of God, and are able to priest ourselves as a living sacrifice in the fellowship of Christ's offering.

This cleansing process requires us to receive and obey the word that is ministered to us from the presbytery. Those who minister the word of grace, as part of the presbytery, have been given the task to adjust us so that we are made clean through the word. If we are to be clean, we must make ourselves available to receive these watchmen when they offer to speak to us and bring adjustment to our lives and families. Paul brought our attention to the importance of this fellowship, writing, 'Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, *for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account*. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.' Heb 13:17.

Refreshing to families

At times, we experience distress as a consequence of relational difficulties or conflict in our families. We feel the shame and reproach that is associated with the ‘muckiness’ of dysfunctional relationships. We fight against the shame and humiliation resulting from these interactions because we feel devalued in the eyes of others, and our self-worth is being eroded. Seeking justice for our humiliation, we fight for our life and refuse to be put down by those whom we believe are causing us injury.

Addressing our carnal desire for vengeance upon those who threaten and hurt us, James, the Lord’s brother, wrote, ‘Where do wars and fights come from *among you*? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.’ Jas 4:1-3. Jesus Himself identified families as a fundamental context for these conflicts, saying, ‘A man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’ Mat 10:36.

It is notable that James attributed the conflict in families to our unwillingness and inability to watch and pray with Christ. King David testified that prayer was his first response to those who reproached him. ‘For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful have opened against me; they have spoken against me with a lying tongue. They have also surrounded me with words of hatred, and fought against me without a cause. *In return for my love they are my accusers, but I give myself to prayer.*’ Psa 109:2-4. Watching and praying with Christ is the antidote to vengeance.

As we receive the washing of the water by the word, we are enabled by the Spirit to watch and pray with Christ. In fellowship with Him, we are able to resist the temptation to seek vengeance for the cruelty, or perceived cruelty, directed toward us by others, including by those in our family. Our heart is sprinkled from an evil conscience, and we are able to appreciate the need to embrace the cross with its accompanying reproach and shame. Heb 13:13. Believing that the fruit of eternal life is given to those who embrace the cross, we maintain a dignified and faithful participation in this process. The life that we obtain in the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings makes us alive from the death of sin, and enables us to obey the command, ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’ Rom 12:20.

Our daily journey with Christ

Through His Melchizedek ministry, Christ has already lived the life of each of us and, through His death, has accomplished our righteousness. That is, He has finished the works that belong to our sonship. As the prophet Isaiah declared, ‘Jehovah, You will ordain peace for us; *for also You have worked all our works for us.*’ Isa 26:12 LITV. The Lord has done this by doing the works that the Father gave Him to do on our account. These are the works that the Father prepared for us to do in Christ. As we remain joined to the Son’s faith and life, we receive the capacity to obey God as His son, and to do the priestly works that belong to our name. By this means, our obedience is made known to all men as a testimony of the faith that we have received.

Through the redemption that is in Christ, we are justified by His faith as long as we do not react to the circumstances of our life and draw back in unbelief from the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings. Rom 5:1. Heb 10:39. Php 3:10. In this fellowship, forgiveness of our sin is operative, and the sufferings and chastenings that we endure each day are part of

the ministry of Christ's offering and priestly work. They are producing sanctification in our life, and are a manifestation of His righteousness so that we are a partaker of His holiness. Heb 12:10.

Christ was raised from the dead because we have been justified and made faultless in Him. Rom 4:25. The whole of our life is joined to Christ's faultless work which was accomplished from the first communion until His work was finished on the cross. For this reason, at the end of each day, Christ, by His grace, is able to present us as faultless before His Father. Jud 1:24. Being made faultless is, therefore, a pathway of progressive attainment as we journey with Christ in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings.

This is true for us as long as we continue to live and walk in the obedience of faith. We receive the faith of the Son of God by hearing the word that God has placed in the mouths of watchmen who are part of a presbytery. Gal 2:20. Rom 1:5. Rom 10:17. If we do not draw back from this word or from the fellowship to which we are being called, we will have great boldness when we stand before the Lord on the day of judgement. Heb 10:39. 1Jn 4:17.