

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, December 4, 2013 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

FAITH TO ENDURE IN TIMES LIKE THESE

Dealing with Opposition

2 Timothy 4:9-18

“⁹Do your best to come to me quickly, ¹⁰for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. ¹²I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. ¹³When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments. ¹⁴Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. ¹⁵You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message. ¹⁶At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. ¹⁷But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion’s mouth. ¹⁸The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” – 2 Timothy 4:9-18 (NIV)

In Times Like These

By Ruth Caye Jones

In times like these you need a Savior, In times like these you need an anchor;
Be very sure, be very sure Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!

This Rock is Jesus, Yes, He's the One; This Rock is Jesus, the only One!
Be very sure, be very sure Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!

We are living in tough times, and it doesn't take a lot of discernment to know that. We began our study on "Faith to Endure in Times Like These" a few weeks ago by look at the words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 3:1-5. He tells us in no uncertain times that "difficult times" are upon us. How does the Christian cope? What are the techniques that spur us on and keep us stable... help us to endure in times like these? This study has centered on such questions. Last time we talked about not getting discouraged and weary in the struggle to live out the faith in times like these, and finishing well. Paul's word in 2 Timothy 4:6-8 provided us with the needed instruction for finishing the task.

It's hard enough staying on top in difficult times when everyone is pulling for us, giving us encouragement and hope. But let a little resistance occur, experience the devastating sting of criticism, and it doesn't take much to blow us away. If it is any comfort, the Apostle Paul experienced that very thing. Paul, having written to Timothy, leaves us with some superb guidelines on how to keep going when there are those who would like to see us succumb to the pressure of opposition.

I. IDENTIFYING THE RESISTANCE (2 Timothy 4:9-16)

While Paul sat in the Mamertine Prison in Rome, surrounded only by his memories, he stepped back into the shadows of his past and saw yesterday plainly. In doing so, he openly shared truth about those who opposed him and made his life hard. Though perhaps this section of his letter could have run over with names, he only identified two men who, for various reasons, resisted him and his teaching. Whereas the first five verses of the chapter carried personal pronouns in second or third person, singular or plural, now his words were accompanied by "I," "me," and "mine." He had become quite personal. Let's not leave the information restricted to a Roman dungeon in the first century, but think in terms of our own experience. Let's adapt it to our own life-style and moment in time.

1. Know your opposition – "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer." – Sun-tzu (Chinese general and military strategist) You must know as much as possible about your enemy. Their every move, their strategies and basically what they are thinking. You must be prepared, in case they attack. You must also know when they are weak and vulnerable, so you can know when to close in on them. Paul did and he identified 2 in our passage:

(1) Demas – He represented the mildest form of opposition. Paul wrote that he "deserted me" (v.10). The term means "to abandon, to leave in a lurch, to let down." He had trusted Demas to keep his word and Demas had failed. Possibly Demas had made promises he didn't fulfill. When this happens to any of us, the result is often disillusionment, bitterness, or the urge to retaliate. What caused Demas to desert? His love for his own world. Perhaps we could note the erosion that occurred in his life. A glance at Philemon 24 tell us that Demas had once been so close to Paul that the apostle referred to him by the endearing title of "fellow-worker." However, a look at Colossians 4:14 records a less intimate response when Paul only referred to him by name... no special title this time. Demas had changed with time. Apparently because of the attractiveness of his world, he made a willful and determined decision to walk away from the truth. He left Paul in a lurch.

3 possible effects of this mild form of opposition on us: (abandonment, leaving in a lurch, letting down, disloyalty)

[1] Disillusionment – We don't feel supported, appreciated, but rather other's let us down and don't show up when we need the we often become disillusioned and may even be tempted to want to give up.

[2] Bitterness/Resentment – We may begin to resent those who have let us down and not been there for us when we needed them. We may begin to harbor feeling

of bitterness and resentment that often go unvoiced, but rather are held deep within where they can breed and spread discontent and inner discord. We may lose our joy and our spiritual life may be greatly weakened and even destroyed.

[3] Urge to Retaliate – Have you ever said or thought, “That find, next time they need me I just won’t be available!” or “What comes around goes around, just see if I show up next then the need something!” We turn ourselves in to the very opposition that we ourselves have experienced. When we have been hurt, let down, and neglected our inclination is often to repay it when given the opportunity.

- (2) **Alexander** – By comparison, Alexander represented the drastic form of opposition. He actively assaulted Paul’s person and activities. Paul claimed, “(He) did me much harm” (v.14) and “... He vigorously opposed our teaching” (v.15). In the first case the term “did” is full of meaning. Here it means “to show forth, to display, to point out information against a person.” In other words, Alexander made slanderous or strong accusations against Paul... dredged up and made up things against him, portraying them as truth. He attacked Paul’s character. Furthermore, in the second clause we see “vigorous” opposition. The term suggests strong measures taken to stand against the apostle’s teaching. Alexander no doubt filtered among the crowds gathered about Paul, to create conflict and spread false allegations against him.

Personal attacks, particularly attacks on your character that defame or demean you or personally tear you down in the eyes of others, are difficult to deal with because there really isn’t much you can do about it. A Christian response... in other words, responding in a “Christ-like” way further limits what you can do. Basically, people are going to believe what they want to believe. To vehemently defend yourself can actually make you look guilty as charged... the “thou doest protest too much” idea. To attack back is never healthy, beneficial or Christian. “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord” (Rom. 12:20) and “Do not avenge yourselves...” (Rom. 12:19). And of course the temptation to believe that if I do nothing my reputation will be destroyed is often too strong to sit idly by and not respond in some way. However, the “do nothing” idea may be closer to the right reaction than you may have imagined.

A.W. Tozer, “Five Vows for Spiritual Power

One of my favorite theologians and one that I pay particular attention to is A.W. Tozer (1897-1963). Tozer has written a piece called “Five Vows for Spiritual Power” in which he lays out five things that he says are keys to true spiritual vigor and power in the life of a Christian. The five things are **(1) Deal thoroughly with sin, (2) Never own anything, (3) Never defend yourself, (4) Never pass anything on about anybody else that will hurt him, and (5) Never accept any glory.**

**NOTE: I have taken these 5 things as a personal challenge for my own life for several years now and, though a struggle, have taken to trying to live by these five things... often failing but non the less striving to live so. I am right now preparing a message that I hope to preach right after the new year based on this piece by Tozer.*

I want to just focus on the third one here... (*I have claimed this for myself as a pastor and in my ministry for year now... though hard it does work*)

The third vow is this: **Never defend yourself.** We're all born with a desire to defend ourselves. And if you insist upon defending yourself, God will let you do it. But if you turn the defense of yourself over to God He will defend you. He told Moses once, in Exodus 23:22: *"I will be an enemy unto thine enemies and an adversary to thine adversaries."*

A long time ago the Lord and I went through the 23rd chapter of Exodus together and He gave it to me. For 30 years now it has been a source of untold blessing to my life. I don't have to fight. The Lord does the fighting for me. And He'll do the same for you. He will be an enemy to your enemy and an adversary to your adversary, and you'll never need to defend yourself.

What do we defend? Well, we defend our service, and particularly we defend our reputation. Your reputation is what people think you are, and if a story gets out about you the big temptation is to try to run it down. But you know, running down the source of a story is a hopeless task. Absolutely hopeless! It's like trying to find the bird after you've found the feather on your lawn. You can't do it. But if you'll turn yourself wholly over to the Lord He will defend you completely and see to it that no one will harm you. *"No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper."* He says, and *"every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn"* (Isaiah 54:17).

Henry Suso was a great Christian of other days. Once he was seeking what some Christians have told me they are seeking--to know God better. Let's put it like this: you are seeking to have a religious awakening within your spirit that will thrust you farther out into the deep things of God. Well, as Henry Suso was seeking God, people started telling evil stories about the man, and it grieved him so that he wept bitter tears and had great sorrow of heart.

Then one day he looked out the window and saw a dog playing on the lawn. The dog had a mat, and kept picking the mat up, tossing it over his shoulder, running and getting it, tossing it some more, picking it up and tossing it again. God said to Henry Suso, "That mat is your reputation, and I am letting the dogs of sin tear your reputation to shreds and toss it all over the lawn for your own good. One of these days things will change."

And things did change. It was not very long before people who were tearing his reputation were confounded, and Suso rose into a place that made him a power in his day and a great blessing still to those who sing his hymns and read his works.

Dealing with Character Attacks: When attacks come your way, consider these ideas.

[1] View personal attacks as a call to prayer - When the heat of attacks builds, the fire can sear you or serve as a call to take the concern to the Lord in prayer. Worrying and obsessing about the causes of our trouble never bring positive results. But when I remember that God invites me to cast all my anxiety on Him and to present my worries to Him in prayer, then I come to Him as one who is weary and burdened and find rest in His presence. Soon I find relief from the sting of the hard times, and I am made aware of the refinement God is producing in my heart.

[2] Find any kernel of truth in what people say- Proudful as I am, it seldom occurs to me that the attack might get under my skin because I know what the person has said contains an element of truth. I need to ask the Lord to show me

how to be honest with myself and with others. The normal defensive posture I assume when under attack can insulate me from confronting a truth about myself. Before retreating or counterattacking, a more helpful approach may be for you to consider the possibility they may be right somewhere in their diatribes against you. Allow the Lord to slow you down long enough to point out some truth about yourself that He does not want you to miss.

[3] Refuse to consider anyone your enemy — meet with him or her personally if possible – I know that for me as a pastor I have learned that shepherds are to lead and feed *all* their sheep, not just the kind, supportive, and cooperative ones. The same principle is true for all of us as believers. The Lord leaves no room for us to accumulate enemies... we are not to do it. Even if those who intentionally try to cause trouble regard us as their enemy, we must refuse to reciprocate. Christ offered one way to deal with our enemies — love them. If possible, meet with your assailants. Bring one or two others who love Christ with you. Mediating a godly solution does more than just restore peace. Seeing enemies reconciled demonstrates the power of God’s love and forgiveness to others who are not used to seeing love in the midst of conflict.

[4] Resist taking the matter into the public – Our inclination when someone has wronged us or said attacking things against us in public that may perhaps cut at our character and reputation is to gather a quorum to support our side. We go public in some way to gather our supporters to our side and at the same time we are damaging the other person and inciting animosity toward them. Our subtle push at revenge! All this really does is blow up and further expose the whole ugly mess and often make it a bigger deal than it is, all in an effort to make us look better. I really doesn’t help or solve the situation. Remember that those who are going to believe what is said against you are going to believe it, and those who are not will not. Going public and involving a host of others really only make a matter worse. Cooler heads should prevail! Keep things private and as confidential as much as possible... always wise.

[5] Maintain a balanced perspective on the size of the problem - Pastors cannot ignore attacks, but these attacks do not need to dominate their lives and ministries. Early in my ministry I believed an attacker when he said, “What I am saying is not just my opinion. A lot of others agree with me.” That is usually not true. But if I believed it were true, I became paranoid about whom those *others* were, how widespread the concern was, and why no one else was saying anything. There will be times when the problem is bigger than we think. Until you know that to be true, treat the criticisms and attacks as isolated incidents you need to address. Do not treat them as major crises that demand the suspension of everything else you are doing until you can resolve them.

2. **Know your opposition’s methods** – Don’t be uninformed, naïve, or caught off guard by the attack of your enemies. Certainly, like Paul, we need to know our opposition, but likewise we need to know the strategy/method used by our opposition. This helps us not only to prepare ourselves for the attacks, but also to enable us to prepare ourselves for a course of action in our own lives. Each man Paul mentions (Demas and Alexander) represented an opposite extreme their method.

2 Methods of Opposition Paul Experienced:

- (1) **Passive resistance... expressed by Demas** – This was expressed by quiet desertion, abandonment and perceived disloyalty. This is often how Christians react in the church when they don't like something or don't get their way.... they passive react. That is, "I don't want to cause a big ruckus so rather than say anything I will just silently oppose by pulling back, dropping out, quitting, withholding my support (financial, or otherwise), that way they will now I am opposed!" The problem is that this is still opposition and it still causes problems and incites division in the body of Christ. It serves the same purpose... to discourage and get the reaction one wants by passively resisting.
- (2) **Aggressive resistance... expressed by Alexander** - This was expressed by public opposition that Alexander incited against Paul personally. This too happens in the church who openly criticize and go to others and talk it up, stir it up, and incite others to their side. It also happens in other avenues of life.

A Practical Tip: Don't expect to make an impact for Christ without opposition. You are going to be opposed, misinterpreted, misrepresented, and misunderstood... and more than likely, you'll be innocent

II. HANDLING THE OPPOSITION

Three ways of dealing with opposition should be held in balance:

3 Ways of Dealing with Opposition:

1. **Realistically... face the facts and openly declare them** – Keep in mind, Paul identified his opponents by name. He accepted the fact of their existence and didn't dodge reality. Realize that some people are toxic and you are going to get burned if you don't handle them carefully. **I can identify my opponents in my previous church by name. I love them, and I sought every opportunity to show them that love and minister to them, but they were difficult and they caused problems. I don't identify them in order to cause them harm or malign them in any way, but for the protection of the churches and the people I served, for their own protection (sometimes these can cause themselves much harm), for the protection of my own family, and my own life.*
2. **Positively... preserve a tolerant viewpoint** – Paul, looking at his deserters, wished that their desertion would not be counted against them (v.16). He did not keep a record of the wrong done against him, even though he lived with the painful effects. With Alexander, whose treatment was assaulting in nature, Paul believed **"the Lord will repay him according to his deeds"** (v.14). How did the apostle Paul believe such an offender should be treated? His conviction is recorded in Romans 12:17 (as quoted earlier), ¹⁷ "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone." He lived by his conviction even under the maximum test He let God handle the wrongdoing (Romans 12:19). Instead of focusing on his enemy, Paul targeted his eyes on the Lord. Notice verses 17 and 18... **"The Lord stood with me..."** and **"The Lord will deliver me."** It was the Lord all the way!

3. **Firmly... be on guard** – The seasoned apostle, with his days numbered, knew he wouldn't have to encounter Alexander anymore. But he wanted the Christians near him to be careful, to be firmly prepared for his attacks.

*Another Practical Tip: Leaving vengeance in the Lord's hands does not mean we drop our guard against the Alexanders in our lives. To do so is to allow such savages to destroy meaningful ministries. Remember that some people are toxic and must be handled carefully. Don't forget Jesus' admonition to believers in **Matthew 10:16, [Persecutions Are Coming] "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves."***

III. CLAIMING THE DELIVERANCE

Our human fear tells us that to do it God's way is to become a doormat. However, Paul didn't think so. His mindset is worth pondering in verses 17-18 of our passage in 2 Timothy 4, *"¹⁷ But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. ¹⁸ The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen."*

From these verses we can draw two conclusion:

2 Keys to Experiencing Peace and Deliverance in Dealing with Opposition:

1. **Claim the Lord's strength for today, without reservation** – Verse 17 says, *"¹⁷ But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth."*
2. **Commit every future event into His Hands, without fear** – In verse 18 Paul tells us, *"¹⁸ The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen."*

A Final Practical Tip: *The one who walks by faith leaves his battle with the Lord*