

## CHURCH AT NETWORK

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### THE DESIGN AND LIFE OF MAN

**PHILLIP D. FLETCHER**

Personal and intimate communication must be given time to time from one man to another. Men who have spent long hours with each other; sharing hopes and dreams, wrestling with ideas and knowledge, cultivate a bond that is communicated in words of great affection, encouragement and exhortation.

Men who care for one another with a great affection are provoked to communicate their strongest and deepest wisdom when confronted with death. It is in the valley of the shadow of death, as men contemplate their last days; their thoughts fall to persons who have had great impact on their lives. It is not the shadow of death that will finally cause a man to pour out his deepest concerns but the great anticipation of what lies ahead and the joy of knowing those closest to him will carry on the work he has tirelessly labored for.

Paul is a father, speaking to his son in the faith Timothy. Paul is writing a final letter to this man as he (Paul), is anticipating death that will be the doorway to joy. He says, "I am already being poured out as a drink offering...my departure has come...I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." Paul is a father exposing his himself to his son, letting him know that what is before him is not despair but the joyful expectation of the Lord's appearing. Bonhoeffer said, "Death is grace, the greatest gift of grace that God gives to people who believe in him. Death is mild, death is sweet and gentle; it beckons to us with heavenly power, if only we realize that it is the gateway to our homeland, the tabernacle of joy, the everlasting kingdom of peace." Paul communicates to his son that his death is God's means to bring him to behold everlasting joy.

I want to take my time today to speak to you gentleman as a father to sons. This is an opportunity for all of us to consider hard things as men yet in the vein of intimate communication, with one another. It is important for spiritually mature and Godly men to sit with men who are wrestling with maturity. We need to look one another square in the eye speaking to one another in order to "fan into flame the gift of God" that is in each of us.

We stand at a point in our history when manhood or more specifically a mature man is passively and actively assaulted by the culture. Commitment is viewed as outdated. A man who seeks to discipline his mind, speech and actions is seen as stiff and sober. The idea of men who will labor long hours for a something greater than themselves is viewed as idealistic and divorced from

reality. We have men who are biologically mature but who are spiritually nursing from the bottle of laziness, chaos and the selfish pursuit of their own desires at the expense of others.

v.1-2

Paul tells Timothy to “be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus...” Strength does not originate from within but it springs forth by what is applied to us. We are shown by a humanistic philosophy that all that is required for the success and advancement of family, community and city, lies within us. We have all that we need to push forward and seize the opportunities that are before us. There is another philosophy at work as well, as materialism proposes that we are empowered to accomplish and accomplish more; as we amass wealth, affluence and knowledge. Paul tells his son that his strength rests not in his own being or in his ministry efforts; it rest in the grace that comes from Christ.

Paul gives this imperative to Timothy to be empowered by Christ on a daily basis. A similar imperative is given to the believers at Ephesus when he states, “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might” (Eph 6:10). We are to receive power that flows from Christ Himself. What we are beginning with here regarding the design of man and life is the fact that man must view the person Jesus Christ as the center and source of his life to impact all of his life. The empowered man who is able to live courageously in a culture where self and materials are elevated, will view the person of Jesus Christ as the center of his being and actions.

The person Jesus Christ abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. It is Jesus Christ who rose from the dead, the offspring of David who is preached in our Gospel. It is the person Jesus Christ who judges the living and the dead being the righteous Judge and rewards with crowns of righteousness.

What I have just described, which are nothing more than Paul’s words to Timothy, are precious words about God’s great reconciling work. We hold dear what is most precious to us and when we must leave because of a new life experience or even death, we desire that that precious thing is cared for by those who cherish it as much as we have.

Timothy has spent some incredible years with Paul beginning in at Lystra and Iconium, on through Macedonia and now Timothy continuing Paul’s work in Ephesus.

What you will say and what you will do, will be seen by others. Timothy has seen and heard the pattern of Paul’s sound words that are in Christ Jesus (1:13), his life experiencing in living out the Gospel to include suffering (3:10) and finally his lessons in faith (3:14). Paul communicates to Timothy: Place this in the hands of other men like yourself. It must be faithful and committed men who will not be cavalier about Christ but are willing to be bold and steadfast to never abdicate the preciousness of Christ at any expense.

I hope you can sense the emotion behind what Paul is saying here to Timothy. The preciousness of the gift of grace that Paul received, which carried him through moments of great elation and suffering is what we all need to grasp. This life, of having Jesus Christ as the locus of all our lives should move us to deep emotion. This prize is ours and as we pass it to others we must look them in the eye and communicate that this prize, Jesus, He is so precious, powerful and ultimate.

v.3-4

Gentleman, the Christian life is hard. I need for us here to count the cost of embracing Christ and seeing all of our lives lived out through him. We should not expect as men who have been commissioned as soldiers in God's kingdom to avoid suffering. Our Captain suffered. Jesus Christ was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities. Jesus Christ was delivered up according to God's definite plan and foreknowledge; he was crucified and killed by lawless men. And he suffered when he was tempted yet without sin.

We follow our Captain into battle and there will be suffering. There will be pain upon our personal lives, marriages and children. We will suffer through economic hardships, bodily threats and abandonment. Those who live godly will suffer persecution.

Timothy is commanded by Paul to embrace and endure afflictions. Paul's life has not been absent of suffering. Because of God's appointing Paul to be a teacher and apostle of the Gospel, he suffers. Timothy is to share in those same sufferings. He is not only to follow the pattern of his Captain Jesus Christ but his lieutenant his sounding forth the command, "We must share in this suffering together."

Men our suffering, the embrace of suffering that was heaped on Christ and then is to flow on us is meant to shape us into Christ himself. The experience of affliction conforms men into the image of Jesus Christ producing in us immeasurable fruits of righteousness.

By implication, the Christian life not only means embracing your own suffering but it will require you to embrace the suffering of others. One of the overwhelming glories of Christ is that he embraced our suffering as well. In His incarnation, Jesus willingly embraced the many afflictions that plague us on a daily basis.

During the lead up to WWII Bonhoeffer famously said that the church "has an unconditional obligation to the victims of any ordering of society even if they do not belong to the Christian community." Even as we bear the burdens of other believers, even as we do well to those of the household of faith, we should do well; we should bear the burdens of all men.

When we embrace the suffering of others, as men, we are proclaiming to the world that Jesus Christ is actively embracing suffering.

v.5-7

We have become too comfortable and not willing to follow our Captain into battle because out there in the battle we face loss. We are comfortable because we have become so connected with the affairs of this world we have forgotten we are soldiers of another. Here is a moment of self-reflection. Here is a moment for us to think deeply as to where we are valuing our own comfort in and above suffering a good soldier for God's Kingdom.

Gentleman, let us follow our Captain. He is calling out, "Follow me!" He is outside the camp of comfort. He is outside the camp of dead theology that is good at arguing but weak in practice. He is outside the camp of marriages where men do not challenge their wives and wives do not challenge their husbands to godly living. He has commissioned us into his army where there will be suffering that will culminate in victory.

Secondly, discipline is needed among many of us. We are disciplined in what we truly want to succeed at. The athlete, who desires to win a marathon, tirelessly hits the road seeking to improve his total mileage over a week's time. The MMA fighter seeking to stand with his hand raised, studies his craft, improves his submission techniques and uses the rules to his advantage. We must be disciplined in our lives as men and this will require you to call out to God and ask him to empower you. "Be filled with the Spirit and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh."

Finally, there is the farmer or diligent man. The farmer understands that what he has put in the ground does not spring up overnight. He is diligent to nurture the land in all types of ways knowing that fruit will come. We are all too eager to have something happen overnight. We have been conditioned to believe that diligent work is not necessary yet we still want all the rewards of hard work.

Gentleman, my own labors these past five years have not come without sacrifice. I have endured long hours, very small finances, multiple strange looks and unanswered doors. I have had to stay up late, get up early, work a job, fight for my family and confess sin. And my work is not done! But I understand like the farmer, that the land I am caring for has within it beautiful seed that will bring forth a harvest for God's glory.

"Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up." Gentleman, no man who has put his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God. Suffering will come. Abandonment will come. Yet continue to do good because God is faithful.

Thing these things over on today as God Himself will teach us his men, yes His children.

So I close with these words:

"Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!"

Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful-- for he cannot deny himself."