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On Sunday we continued our series in 2 Timothy, focussing in on chapter 2v11-13. as Paul summarises the first section of his letter to Timothy in Ephesus. It's described as 'a trustworthy saying' - a set of 4 pithy "if... then" statements that both seek to explain the situation in Ephesus, as well as help Timothy (and us) to persevere.

The challenge with these verses are not so much the 'understanding' of them (though the final one is a little tricky) but the succinct 'in-your-face' way in which they warn and encourage.

Death = Life

Paul promises that if we have died with Christ we will live with him. To be a Christian we are to be those who associate ourselves with the Jesus who dies on the Friday and so our old self is gone - and with the Jesus who was raised again on the Sunday (cf 2v8). The challenge is, in a prosperous city like Ephesus (or Oxford), is that we naturally revert to the definition of life that the world has, rather than daily death to self as Jesus demands. When we die with him, so we receive the blessings and forgiveness that his death won, and so can truly know our Father in Heaven and so have true life.

Endure = Reign

Paul spoke last time of his motivation for endurance (2v10) as the eternal glory of the elect worshipping Jesus. He asks Timothy (and us) here whether he is prepared to also endure. Again, as we do this we follow in the footsteps of Jesus who, for the joy set before him, endured the cross (Hebrews 12v2). For those who endure, the promise is reigning with him (cf Matthew 19v28-30) - a picture of serving Jesus, with him, in his new kingdom. Suffering now and yet glory later as we serve him forever in his kingdom.

Disown = Disown

Paul is also clear though as he warns them that the fate of those who wander off from the apostolic gospel, will be God disowning them (cf Matthew 10v32-33). God is not a totalitarian tyrant who ignores what we want - if we chose not to have him, he will hold us to that.

Faithless = Faithful

Is a tricky final couplet! There are 3 main interpretive possibilities - all work grammatically and within the letter

if we are faithless (like Timid Timothy for example) - God is faithful and won't let us go. This is his mission
 if we faithless (as in disbelieving like Hymenaeus and Philetus) - God is faithful to himself and will justly judge accordingly - the structure of the 'trustworthy saying' backs this up as this one parallels with
 if we are faithless (as we look around at the mess of the world and difficulties of ministry and the Hymenaeuses and Philetuses wandering off) then we can trust that God is still in charge and faithful - the plan is still working!

We finished by remembering how Paul started this section in 2v1. For the strength to do these things - don't look in but look to him and his grace.

Here are a few questions to start discussion off - as always, feel free to adapt for your group

Brainstorm all that you remember from 2 Timothy so far. In particular - what do you remember from last week (2v1-10) Has anyone started 1 in 21?!

What does to mean to die with him? What does that mean each day? Look up Luke 9v21-25 - what does Jesus say here about discipleship? What kind of life does he offer? How do we stop ourselves defining life as the world defines life? What evidence might there be that we are defining life as the world does?

How do you think we endure with him? What motivation do we need? 2v10 - how did Paul endure? What does it mean to reign with him? How much does future glory impact how we live now?

What does it mean to disown Him? When are we tempted to do that? What challenge does he give for when we are tempted?

Which of the 3 options do you think is correct? Evaluate the strengths (and weaknesses) of each?

What does it practically mean to be strong in the grace that's in Christ Jesus

What 1 thing can you take away from these verses?