

A Chiasmic Structure in 2 Timothy 2:11-13 (RSV & GNP)

The saying is sure:

A¹ If **we have died with him**, we shall also live with him;

B¹ if **we endure**, we shall also **reign with him**;

B² if **we deny** him, he also will **deny us**;

A² if **we are faithless**, he remains faithful

for he *cannot* deny himself.

πιστὸς ὁ λόγος·

A¹ εἰ γὰρ **συναπεθάνομεν**, καὶ **συζήσομεν**·

B¹ εἰ **ὑπομένομεν**, καὶ **συμβασιλεύσομεν**·

B² εἰ **ἀρνησόμεθα**, κἀκεῖνος **ἀρνήσεται ἡμᾶς**·

A² εἰ **ἀπιστοῦμεν**, ἐκεῖνος πιστὸς μένει,

ἀρνήσασθαι γὰρ ἑαυτὸν *οὐ δύναται*.

A question arises in 2 Timothy 2:13: To what does Jesus remain faithful? If the verses are read straight through, they seem to say that Jesus remains faithful to giving the privilege of reigning with Him to those who endure persecution and deny eternal life to those who deny Him; this is the customary reading of the text. However, this interpretation has an implicit difficulty. In verse 11 the verb, *to die with Him*, is an aorist verb looking back to something that has already taken place—likely referring to one's baptism as in Romans 6:3 and following:

Romans 6:3-5 (NASB) Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? {4} Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. {5} For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection,

Hence, following the customary reading: for those who have died with Jesus, having been buried with Him in baptism—if they deny Him in the midst of persecution, then He will deny them eternal life—so that they in fact will not live with Him; this reading renders Jesus unfaithful to keeping His promise in verse 11. However, if the verses are read as a chiasmic structure, the meaning comes into focus. The promise stands: everyone who dies with Him *will* live with Him. The second and third lines of the chiasmus go together. For those who endure persecution, they will gain the reward of reigning with Him; for those who deny Him—in the midst of persecution—they will be denied the reward of reigning with Him. Also, in this chiasmus the first and fourth lines go together. For those who are *faithless*, He will remain *faithful* to keep His promise: if they have died with Him, they will yet live with Him, because He cannot deny Himself. In this reading Jesus remains true to His promise that all those who believe in Him have eternal life, will not come into judgment, and have passed (already) from death to life (John 5:24)! Which reading might encourage one facing persecution: the threat of damnation if one fails, or the certain hope of eternal life and the added benefit of reigning with Him if one succeeds in enduring the persecution? The customary reading renders Jesus fickle in keeping His promise and attempts to motivate us out of fear; the reading arising out of recognizing the chiasmic structure renders Jesus faithful—even when we are faithless—and seeks to motivate us out of His grace. The saying is sure! However, a question remains. Which will truly motivate us in the midst of persecution: Fear or Grace?