

BE ENCOURAGED

2 Timothy 1

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2 Timothy 1:1–18 (NIV)

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, To Timothy, my dear son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day. What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. You know that everyone in the province of Asia

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has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.

On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus.”

This last letter of the apostle Paul is certainly the most personal letter of all that he wrote. We see some differences in setting from the letter which he wrote Timothy the first time. We also see some differences in this imprisonment that is reflected in 2 Timothy from the imprisonment that Paul experienced earlier as is noted in the Acts 28 and the prison letters—Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon.

Some of the changes of circumstances are these. In Paul’s first letter to Timothy (1:3), he notes that he left Timothy at Ephesus while he was going to Macedonia. Perhaps the first letter came from Paul when he was in Macedonia. He reflects to Timothy in that first letter his hopes to return to Ephesus. But, as can be seen from a companion letter, Titus (3:12), he had a change of plans and decided to winter even further west than Macedonia, in the town of Nicopolis.

Somewhere, either at Nicopolis or perhaps he made the journey back east to Troas, but somewhere in between, or there, he was arrested. Perhaps he was arrested at Troas and that would account for the reference in 2 Timothy 4 to having left his coat at Troas. Maybe his arrest there happened so suddenly that he was not able to take adequate provision with him.

We do know, however, and it’s clear from this letter, that this is a very dangerous time in his life. Martyrdom is imminent. He expects to be killed for his identity and loyalty to Jesus Christ. It is the years immediately following the outbreak of the fire at Rome in A.D. 64. Nero’s wrath is being felt sporadically but when felt, felt intensely in various parts of the Roman world.

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This letter to Timothy reflects the nature of some of these dire circumstances. Already he has stood trial once—2 Timothy 4:16. While he has not been acquitted, at least the result has not terminated in his martyrdom.

He has already launched one defense, which has thus far kept him alive. In that defense no one came to his side as a character witness on his behalf. He is in a prison circumstance that appears to be very barren. The suggestion may be taken from 1:17 that he has holed up somewhere in a prison cubicle that is hard to find. He especially notes that Onesiphorus had to search for him. He is also seen to be wearing the shackles of chains. He describes himself in 2:9 as fettered. One of the most touching and poignant phrases I think in all the literature of the New Testament in reference to Paul is found in chapter 4 when he implores Timothy that when he comes to bring with him the cloak which he (Paul) had left at Troas. That reference shows that the man at this point is in a condition of poverty. That he is in a condition of such extreme need that, as he faces the advent of winter in that cold and barren cell, the thought of facing it without his cloak is one that is overriding to him, so that he requests so simple a thing.

The setting is so remarkably different from his earlier imprisonment reflected in Acts 28 and the prison letters. For one thing, now he is alone. In Acts 28 and Colossians and Philippians he is seen as having a ministry to others. Acts presents him as maintaining a house for two years at his own expense where the multitudes can come and he can minister to them, as well as the Jewish leaders and to the Roman community, as well as the Christian leaders who were making calls on him from the various parts of the world.

Now no one is coming to his side, and he feels deserted and alone. In the earlier prison experience he expected release. That certainly is indicated a number of times in the Philippian letter. But now he expects no release. Instead he's saying, as this letter closes, "The time of my

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departure is at hand. I have fought the fight. I have kept the faith. Henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy 4:6–8).

In this last and most personal letter, therefore, knowing some of the circumstances and realizing it was penned in the barrenness of a prison cubicle, one turns in this letter and finds the warm fire of devotion and ardor that is in the apostle’s heart and mind as he writes his younger companion in the Christian ministry, this protégé. As of all his letters, he begins with a greeting. The simple courtesies are never ignored.

Thus in the first two verses he identifies himself as the sender of the letter and he identifies Timothy as the recipient. As in the case of ancient letters, the ancients being more wise than we, the name of the sender is given first that he who reads it might know at first glance who sent it. Then immediately Paul notes his occupation—apostle of Christ Jesus. It can be noted as you read through Paul’s letters that there are occasions in which he uses his apostleship in connection with his name. And there are occasions when he does not. In his other letters he generally uses the term “apostle” when his apostleship is in question by some heretical teaching element within the church. He uses the term “apostle” to indicate his authority over that group. In a church, however, which accepts his apostleship he is remiss or he is reluctant to use the title because they accept it without his stating it. Here, however, to Timothy, in the most personal letter of all he uses his apostleship and refers to it. Not in virtue of the fact that Timothy doesn’t realize he’s an apostle, but rather it is a glaring contrast with the external circumstances which Paul finds himself in. He is a criminal—he is in chains—as far as the Roman government is concerned. But in his heart he recognizes his high calling.

The word “apostle” means “one sent.” And he had been one sent to the mission fields of the Mediterranean world to the churches and the people, to the Greeks and to the Jews, to the

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barbarians, to the slave and the free, to male and to female. As he is sent to them so now in this prison cubicle he has the sense of still being sent. God had put him there. An apostle of Christ Jesus. Never could he get away from the fact that wherever he was it was according to the will of God. He had not asked for this ministry. It had been thrust upon him by the divine initiative and intervention of God. Therefore because of that he could have the confidence of the promise of life that was soon to come upon him.

One might normally expect that a person in these kinds of circumstances would be discouraged or apprehensive about the future. You have, instead, the story of the true Christian man—or woman, if that would be the case—who looks to the future with hope rather than fear because of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done. The promise of life which is in Christ Jesus.

You'll notice that, in Paul's employment of the title for the Lord, that in the first two verses he employs the term "Christ Jesus" three times. That name is dominant in his thinking and it reflects and continues to be dominant throughout the letter.

There are various ways we can refer to the Lord. One way that the Lord is referred to is "Jesus Christ." When He is referred to in this way, the nuance and emphasis is upon the fact that first of all the relationship of Jesus—the Man who came and had a human name. But the term "Christ" signifies His title, His office. It literally means "Messiah." It'd be more appropriate that one of the twelve disciples following Him in Galilee and Judea should speak of Him as Jesus Christ, for they came to know Him first as Jesus and then as Christ. But for Paul it is not "Jesus Christ," it is "Christ Jesus." Because his first exposure to the Lord was the Lord in risen form and power. His first exposure to the person of Jesus Christ was when Jesus revealed himself in the awesome splendor of His anointing, His messiahship. Paul, therefore, in these moments, girds his mind up with this strong truth. That Jesus is the Christ. The Christ is the dominant element seen first.

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“To Timothy my beloved child” (1 Timothy 1:2). The closeness of relationship is so powerfully seen throughout this letter. In 1 Timothy, Paul refers to Timothy as his true child. Now the emphasis is upon love. The depth of their love is further seen in verse 4 where Paul notes that Timothy has shed tears over Paul. Perhaps the tears being referred to are the tears of parting which were experienced when Paul was wrested away from the Christian community by the Roman soldiers who arrested him. Those tears signify their relationship in the gospel as ministers had been more than simply doing the work of the Kingdom. It also involved a deep love relationship that bound and knit their hearts together. And being absent from one another had only increased their love and desire to see each other. So it’s “my beloved child.”

Then the blessing or the benediction, which offers through Jesus Christ the attributes which Timothy needs in this hour for his own life. God’s grace, continuing favor upon this man and his life and ministry. His mercy, to grant him the ease of circumstance, that would somehow provide the oil and cushion in the midst of the tension and frustration. And peace in the middle of the terrible storm of persecution that was breaking out against various pockets of the church, the persecution which threatened Timothy individually—against the strategy of Satan that would cut Timothy off as a key leader of the church. Paul says nevertheless, peace be with you. Peace on the inside while the storm rages on the outside.

When Paul is finished with that greeting he then, in chapter 1, gives a series of remembrances of Timothy in verses 3–7. Then a series of admonitions in verses 8–14. Then a reminiscence of association in verses 15–18.

I. Paul’s remembrances of Timothy point to their deep bond in faith and ministry.

First of all the remembrances. It is natural to think here of Paul as wanting to remember. He had time on his hands. The verb “remember” is used in verses 3,4,5 and 6. In the original language,

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by the way, there are synonyms in place for “remembrance” rather than using the same word on each occasion. What is he remembering? He is remembering the following:

A. He is remembering Timothy in his prayers. Consistent with the nature of the Jewish faith—the reference to “my forefathers” (verse 3, NIV), consistent with his desire to maintain a clear conscience before God. He consistently also remembers Timothy in prayer.

B. And he remembers Timothy in his feeling. “I remember your tears. I long to see you” (verse 4). That verb “I long” indicates very strong desire. It’s used for a desire for things or a desire for people. When used as a desire for people it is an intense desire. It shows the closeness of the relationship between them.

“I long.” Why? Because when I’m with you, you make me happy. I want to be filled with joy. I used to think that Paul was a somewhat-difficult-to-understand, brittle, ivory-tower theologian who was forever giving me mental problems as I read through Romans and Galatians. He seemed so far above me. So remote. So authoritarian. Now Paul says, “I am persuaded” (verse 5). That doesn’t mean he’s entertaining doubts but that he is sure that faith dwells in Timothy.

C. There is also in this remembrance of Timothy, a remembrance of Timothy’s ministry, verses 6 and 7. “I remind you to rekindle the gifts of God.” That verb “rekindle” literally is “again light fire.” It carries the connotation not of fire which has blazed hotly for a while and then dissipated and lost its spark and has to be fanned back into activity. It rather speaks of a flame that is going forcefully and steadily and which needs to continue in that forceful and steady flaming. The connotation is not that Timothy has somehow let his ardor for the Lord and for the ministry die down and now Paul is waving something at the fire to fan it up. But he’s, in effect, saying as one translator puts it, “Keep blazing. Keep blazing in the gifts of God.” The charisma. The charisma is the gifts. The charisma that came to Timothy when hands were laid upon him ordaining him

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for the ministry. The nature of that charisma is seen in 1 Timothy. It simply meant that when Timothy was ordained at the hands of the apostle and elders, that responsibility and inward gift of teaching and preaching and ruling in the Christian community were laid upon him. Now more than ever in the midst of tough circumstances there was a need for that charisma, that preaching, teaching, and ruling ministry to continue effectively.

II. Timothy is reminded by Paul of the qualities of minister he must continue to possess.

Good qualities for our own lives. “God has not given us the spirit of timidity” (1 Timothy 1:7) or cowardice. As an easily identified Christian leader in the Roman province of Asia, Timothy was the next man on the list of hunted men. So for Timothy it might have been tempting to duck out of his Christian responsibility. Temptation might await him of denying even his high calling. So therefore Paul said to him, we cannot be timid or cowardly as Christians. Instead these positive qualities are to be held—the spirit of power and love and self-control.

The spirit of power brings with it an aggressive energy in the face of difficulty. It speaks of a person who reaches the breaking point and keeps on going without breaking. That’s the spirit of power.

The spirit of love is that sacrificial serving which involves putting the interest of the Lord and the interest of others in the Christian community ahead of one’s own personal interests.

The spirit of self-control is a particular word referring to the fact that in a time of crisis one can become panicky and crisis-oriented in his judgment and decisions. Rather than being that, this man must keep a fervent grip on his mental faculties that he can continue to think and act as he ought as a Christian leader.

Paul then gives certain admonishments to Timothy. Encouragement. There are four imperatives in all that are found in these verses 8–14.

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A. The first imperative that is given to Timothy is the imperative: “Do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord nor of me, Paul, His prisoner” (verse 8). Do not be ashamed.

We must understand here that the particular tense of the verb is such that what is being forbidden is not an action which has already begun. That is to say, Timothy, at this point in his life, is not yet or has never expressed shame of being identified with Christ or with Paul. The imperative that is being given denotes the kind of action which has not yet begun. Paul is saying to Timothy, “Don’t ever begin being ashamed of the testimony of Jesus Christ or of me His prisoner.”

B. In addition to this, the apostle lays before Timothy another imperative: Take your share of suffering. The idea is literally “with evil to suffer.” “With evil to suffer” denotes charity or participating in the suffering that other Christians are going through. Why? For the sake of the good news. Take your share of suffering for the good news, for the gospel.

It’s a heartening thing to recognize in this letter when Paul is going through so much adversity that he’s not lost hold of that overriding and dominant understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ. When we serve Him it is good news, and the suffering should be taken with the understanding that good news lies within us. And that suffering can also be experienced not with weakness, not with a giving in, but with a responding to according to power. The very power of God.

When Paul comes to speak of God he cannot contain himself to his subject. We have seen this twice in 1 Timothy. When Paul would mention the name of God all of a sudden his mind would go off and he’d be in for a eulogy, a state of praise to the Lord. Now he does it again. He no sooner says “power of God” than he begins to realize how that power of God is expressed in his own life. So for a moment he leaves off giving the imperative to Timothy and does a little reviewing of what the Lord has done for him.

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I think this is super in the apostle! The parentheses in his writings are great to find. He identifies the power of God and God himself as One who has saved us and called us. The act of saving us, salvation, is an instant act whereby we go from a state of sin to a state of salvation. In one moment we go from being inaccessible in God's presence through the next moment, in Jesus Christ, fully accepted in His presence. When we are saved God invites us in our calling to a life that is consecrated to Him. He has called us not because of our work but because He purposed it. Because He wanted to give us grace. And He wanted to give us this grace even ages ago.

That word "before the beginning of time" (verse 9, NIV) doesn't quite reflect all that is there in that term literally. When I look at that, I think before people measured the origin of the earth in thousands of years. Or before time began to be divided into evening and day. Before the clock of the universe started. In the eternity past God was thinking of us. That's what Paul is saying here. The Lamb has been slain from the foundation of the world. Paul may be going through the transitory experience of imprisonment and potential martyrdom but he had a hold upon that which is eternal. The eternal will and purpose of God which desires and plans to save him. That eternal purpose from ages past in God's mind fully expressed itself and manifested itself in Jesus Christ.

That word "manifested" is the word "epiphany" which we use at Christmastime. Most often the word in the New Testament is used of the second coming of our Lord. Only once does it refer to His first coming. And it is here. When our Lord came, what did He do? He abolished death.

You say, "I don't see that He abolished death. It's still very much around." The verb here "abolish" literally means to render inoperative. To render of no effect. To take the sting out so that it is powerless. It does not yet mean that at this point that he has evaded the physical act of death itself where Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:26, "There will come a day in which the final

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enemy death will be abolished.” That is physical death. But as the apostle Paul faces martyrdom he is thinking of the fact and knowing of a certainty that death has no hold on him. That to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. And that the Lord through His dying and rising again had effectively abolished the influence and power of death. He has rendered it inoperative. For Him and for every believer. Death has no power over you as a child of God. The physical body dies, but you cannot die. Your soul cannot be annihilated. It is reserved for God. Not only has the Lord abolished death, but He has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. We can understand now what it is to be saved and to be pleasing to God because of Christ. Paul says all of this related to him in the following manner. And he makes personal affirmations here. “I was appointed preacher and one sent,” that is, apostle and teacher (verse 11). He says, “Secondly, I suffer” (verse 12). I know why I’m suffering. It’s not because of some stupidity on my part. It’s not because I elected to do this. It’s not because I’m an anarchist. I suffer because of my loyalty and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Thirdly, I am not ashamed.” Paul here was going through a period in his life when there were many associates of his that were ashamed. The pressure of the circumstances had been such that they had left off loudly professing and publicly professing their identity with Christ. This was a very important theme for him in this letter to say, “I am not ashamed.”

Then a fourth affirmation: “I know whom I have believed.” I love that statement. Paul does not say, “I know *what* I have believed.” He wasn’t hoping at this point in a set of doctrinal truths he had come to believe in mentally. His salvation was not in a creed. It was in the personal God himself. It’s one thing to say, “I believe in this, this, and this.” But it’s another thing to say, “I believe in this person.” And the faith which the apostle had is one which is in the living Lord. “I know whom I have believed.”

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And a fifth affirmation: “I am sure.” Certainty. No doubt about it at all. “I am certain that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to him.” In the pastoral letters, 1 and 2 Timothy, three times Paul returns to this theme of something that needs to be guarded. A deposit that has been given. A deposit would be placed in the bank and it was to be kept secure until the depositor came back to collect it. Paul sees the faith that’s being deposited in a living way in our lives. We’re to guard that faith lest it be taken from us.

But the responsibility to guard the faith is not only our responsibility. It’s God’s responsibility as well. So Paul, on the one hand, can say to Timothy, “Guard the faith.” But he can turn right around and say that it’s God’s task also to guard the faith which has been entrusted.

C. He says to Timothy, “Do not be ashamed. Take your share of suffering.” Now he says in verse 13, “Follow the pattern of sound words.” “The pattern” means there’s a systematic teaching of spiritual development that Timothy had been given as a trainee under the apostle. A pattern in which Timothy in turn was expected to communicate to the congregation.

The word “pattern” here can be used to describe an outlining sketch that an architect can make before getting down to detailed drawing. God has a blueprint for our lives in the Scripture revealed to us in Jesus. Follow the pattern in faith and love. Not in contentiousness.

D. Then a fourth imperative to Timothy, “Guard the truth.” We’ve already seen the implication of this.

III. Associations with believers can strengthen or disappoint.

Paul continues in his letter in verses 15–18. He speaks of associations with other believers. A severe disappointment to him has been the fact that all those in Asia have turned away from him. By “Asia” here Paul means the Roman province of Asia which is modern-day Turkey. Evidently what’s happening was this. At Paul’s trial he had attempted previous to that trial in constructing

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a defense to send word to various responsible lay members of the Christian community in Asia to summon them to come to his side, to be witnesses of his reputation and his character for the sake of showing to the Roman judge that he was not a revolutionary. He wanted persons to come to his side. He could not ask someone like Timothy, for example, because Timothy was closely associated with him in the ministry and would be regarded as a co-conspirator rather than as a person of character and reputation.

We're trying to read between the lines here. Paul's sent out word. Would some outstanding Christian leaders of Asia come and rally to his defense? He says in chapter 4, "All have forsaken me. All deserted me." Even two outstanding leaders he names but whom we know nothing of, except they're referred to here—Phygelus and Hermogenes.

We have to, like Paul, learn how to live the Christian life when those closest to us have given us bitter disappointment. When those closest to us have let us down. Even though Paul has been sadly let down by these compatriots of his he has not given up on the Lord. He has not let it sink his boat. He recalls the association that has been a tremendous blessing to him. That is Onesiphorus. Onesiphorus' name literally means "profitable" or "profit-bringer," "useful" or "helpful." It was a term that could be coined of a slave, and perhaps Onesiphorus was a slave, but we do not know that. Paul says that "he often refreshed me." The word "refreshed" has at its root idea, "to cool off." A beautiful picture of the idea of refreshing.

"Furthermore, Onesiphorus was not ashamed of my chains. He was willing to be identified with me. Furthermore, he searched for me eagerly when he arrived in Rome." It was not "I'll look him up," but it was an active search which involved going through corridors and various cubicles where prisoners were and asking, "Where is the man, Paul." He found him. At last he found him.

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Paul also is reminded of his service, Onesiphorus' service, which he gave at Ephesus. Service in the gospel which even Timothy knew better of than Paul himself. "You know well" (verse 18). There are in Scripture what one might call "one-liners," Where a person is named only once and attached to that name is some description. Some people modestly succeed in the one-liner like Onesiphorus. Others are incredible disappointing failures. I don't know if Phygelus and Hermogenes are in heaven. I don't think the deserting being spoken of is a deserting from the faith. It appears to be more an act of cowardice of identifying with Paul. But I'm sure if they had realized how many thousands of people over twenty centuries were going to read this letter, and that the one thing from their life that was going to be remembered for posterity was that they deserted Paul in his hour of need, they would have checked themselves in that moment. That's kind of an incentive to live every moment of life as if it were the one-liner that was going to make it.

Closing Prayer

There are too many beautiful things, Lord, for our inner spiritual meditation in this moment. We think of words that encourage us—"not ashamed," "I serve," "I know," "I am sure"—these great affirmations of belief and identity with You. Lord, I pray that from this experience today there would come again that strong settledness of the faith as the foundation of our lives. That in the moments of daily testing we would find our identity with the faithful who have been guarded by You and who guard the truth themselves. Help, Lord, our relationships with one another to be warm and tender, indeed, as the relationships which are reflected in these beautiful words we've shared today. Help the living nature of our hope to be an ever-continuing theme of reminder in our lives. That we but live for a day and then we're to enjoy all days in Your presence forever. We thank You, Lord, that before the ages of time You were thinking of us. You were making

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provisions for us. Now, Lord Jesus, we thank You that we have Your further promise that not only were You thinking of us before the ages of time, but You are now preparing a place for us that where You are we may be also. The hope is sure and settled today that we await Your coming or, if need be, we await seeing You through the passage of death. But we know we shall be united with You and we shall be like You. We praise You today for Your wonderful gospel. In Christ our Lord. Amen.