

Christians Courageous! (2 Timothy 1)

When Paul wrote the letter we know as 2 Timothy, his situation had changed drastically. He was now a prisoner in Rome and was facing certain death (2 Tim. 4:6). For one reason or another, almost all of Paul's associates in the ministry were gone and only Luke was at the apostle's side to assist him (2 Tim. 4:11). It was a dark hour indeed.

But Paul's great concern was not for himself; it was for Timothy and the success of the gospel ministry. As in his first letter to Timothy, Paul encouraged his beloved colleague to be faithful. As we have learned, Timothy was timid, suffered from physical ailments, and was tempted to let other people take advantage of him and not assert his authority as a pastor.

Paul sent Tychicus to replace Timothy at Ephesus so that Timothy might join Paul at Rome (2 Tim. 4:9, 12). God would soon move Paul off the scene, and Timothy would take his place and continue to give spiritual leadership to the churches. It would not be an easy task, but Timothy could succeed with the Lord's help. In his first chapter, Paul gave Timothy three essentials that he must possess to have success.

1. Courageous Enthusiasm (1:1–7)

The ministry of the gospel is no place for a "timid soul" who lacks enthusiasm. In fact, courageous enthusiasm is essential for success in any kind of work. Paul compared this attitude to stirring up a fire into full flame (2 Tim. 1:6 NIV). We must not conclude that Timothy was backslidden or lacked spiritual fire. Rather, Paul was encouraging his associate to keep the fire burning brightly so that it might generate spiritual power in his life. Paul gave Timothy four encouragements.

(1) Paul's love (vv. 1–2). "Timothy, my dearly beloved son" is much stronger than "Timothy, my own son in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2). It is not that Paul loved Timothy less when he wrote that first letter, but that Paul was now expressing it more. As Paul's life drew to a close, he realized in a deeper way how dear Timothy was to him.

Paul's own circumstances were difficult, and yet he was greatly encouraged. For one thing, he was Christ's ambassador ("apostle"), and he knew that his

Master would care for him. Whatever happened to him was in the hands of God, so there was no need to fear. Furthermore, Paul had "the promise of life" in Jesus Christ, and Christ had defeated death (2 Tim. 1:10). No wonder Paul was able to extend to Timothy "grace, mercy, and peace." (It is worth noting that Paul added "mercy" to his greetings when he wrote to the pastors, 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4. Paul knew that pastors need mercy!)

(2) Paul's prayers (vv. 3–4). What an encouragement to know that the great apostle was praying for him! Paul, who knew Timothy's weaknesses and problems, was able to pray definitely and with a real burden on his heart. His praying was not routine; it was done with compassion and concern. Knowing that he would soon die, Paul was anxious that Timothy join him at Rome for those last days of fellowship and ministry. This would bring joy to Paul's heart.

We must not assume that Paul tried to defend his evil actions before his conversion by claiming he did it all with "a pure conscience." After all, he was guilty of causing terror among Christians, forcing people to blaspheme by denying Christ, and agreeing to the murder of Stephen! It is true that Paul thought he was serving God (see John 16:2), and that he was in spiritual ignorance (1 Tim. 1:13), but these facts cannot guarantee a pure conscience.

Paul had known God from his earliest years because he was a "Hebrew of the Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5). His ancestors had given him the orthodox Jewish faith. But when he met Jesus Christ, Paul realized that his Jewish faith was but preparation for the fulfillment Christ gave him in Christianity. He did not serve God with a pure conscience "from his forefathers," as the King James Version says. Rather, he heard about the true God from his forefathers, and now he was serving that God with a pure conscience. The fact that he had a pure conscience helped give power to his prayers.

(3) Paul's confidence in Timothy (v. 5). Paul did not think that Timothy's tears were evidence of failure or insincerity. Paul was sure that Timothy's faith was genuine, and that this faith would see him through in spite of the troubles he was facing. Apparently Lois, Timothy's grandmother, was the first one in the family won to Christ; then his mother, Eunice, was converted. Timothy's father was a Greek (Acts 16:1), so Eunice had not practiced the orthodox Jewish faith. However, Timothy's mother and grandmother had seen to it that he was taught the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15), and this was great

preparation for the hearing of the gospel. When Paul came to Lystra on his first missionary journey, that was probably the occasion for Timothy's conversion. When Paul returned on his second journey, he enlisted Timothy into Christian service.

Paul had watched Timothy's life and service during those years they were together. He was certain that Timothy's faith was genuine. In fact, Timothy's heritage was a great one, for he was reared in a godly home, trained by a wonderful apostle, and given marvelous opportunities for serving the Lord.

(4) God's gift to Timothy (vv. 6–7). Paul reminded Timothy of the time God called him into service and the local church ordained him. Paul had laid his hands on Timothy (1 Tim. 4:14). Through Paul, God had imparted to Timothy the spiritual gift he needed for his ministry. The laying on of hands was a common practice in apostolic days (Acts 6:6; 13:3), but no believer today has the same authority and privileges that the apostles did. Today, when we lay hands on people for the ministry, it is a symbolic act and does not necessarily impart any special spiritual gifts to them.

It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to serve God, and through Him we can overcome fear and weakness. The word fear in 2 Timothy 1:7 means "timidity, cowardice." The Holy Spirit gives us power for witness and for service (Acts 1:8). It is futile for us to try to serve God without the power of the Holy Spirit. Talent, training, and experience cannot take the place of the power of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit also gives us love. If we have love for lost souls and for the people of God, we will be able to endure suffering and accomplish the work of God. Selfishness leads to fear because, if we are selfish, we are interested only in what we will get out of serving God, and we will be afraid of losing prestige, power, or money. True Christian love, energized by the Spirit (Rom. 5:5), enables us to sacrifice for others and not be afraid. The Spirit gives love (Gal. 5:22).

He is also the One who gives self-control ("a sound mind"). This word is related to the words sober and sobriety that we often meet in the pastoral letters (1 Tim. 2:9, 15; Titus 1:8; 2:2, 4, 6, 12). "Self-discipline" is a better translation of "sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7). It describes a person who is sensibly minded and balanced, who has his life under control. The Amplified Version reads, "calm and well-balanced mind and discipline and self-control."

Timothy did not need any new spiritual ingredients in his life; all he had to do was "stir up" what he already had. Paul had written in his first letter, "Neglect not the gift that is in thee" (1 Tim. 4:14). Now he added, "Stir up—stir into flame—the gift of God." The Holy Spirit does not leave us when we fail (John 14:16), but He cannot fill us, empower us, and use us if we neglect our spiritual lives. It is possible to grieve the Spirit (Eph. 4:30) and quench the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19).

Timothy had every reason to be encouraged and to have spiritual enthusiasm in his ministry. Paul loved him and prayed for him. His experiences in life had been preparation for his ministry, and Paul was confident of the genuineness of Timothy's faith. The Spirit within him would give all the power needed for ministry. What more could he want?

2. Shameless Suffering (1:8–12)

"Not ashamed" is a key idea in this chapter. Paul was not ashamed (2 Tim. 1:12); he admonished Timothy not to be ashamed (2 Tim. 1:8); and he reported that Onesiphorus was not ashamed of Paul's chain (2 Tim. 1:16).

Be not ashamed of the Lord's testimony (vv. 8–10). Timothy's natural timidity might make it easy for him to avoid circumstances that demanded witness and involved suffering. Once again, Paul gave his associate needed encouragement.

God gives us power (v. 8). By nature, none of us enjoys suffering. Even our Lord prayed, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me" (Luke 22:42), and Paul prayed three times for God to remove his painful thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7–8). But suffering may well be a part of a faithful Christian life. Christians should not suffer because they have done wrong (1 Peter 2:20; 3:17); rather, they sometimes suffer because they have done right and served God. When we suffer for doing good, then we are sharing Christ's sufferings (Phil. 3:10) and suffering on behalf of the whole church (Col. 1:24).

Years ago, I read about a Christian who was in prison because of his faith. He was to be burned at the stake, and he was certain he would never be able to endure the suffering. One night, he experimented with pain by putting his little finger into the candle flame. It hurt, and he immediately withdrew it. "I will disgrace my Lord," he said to himself. "I cannot bear the pain." But when the hour came for him to die, he praised God and gave a noble witness for Jesus

Christ. God gave him the power when he needed it, and not before.

God has called us by His grace (v. 9). We are part of a great eternal plan that God determined “before the world began.” God knows the end from the beginning. He has purposes for His people to accomplish for His glory. Suffering is a part of His plan. Jesus Christ suffered in the will of God here on earth, and all those who trust in Him will also suffer.

The emphasis in this verse is on grace. God saved us; we did not save ourselves (Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:5). He called us, not on the basis of our good works, but wholly on the basis of His grace. It is His purposes that we are to fulfill, and if these purposes include suffering, then we can accept it by faith and know that God’s will is best. This is not fatalism. It is confidence in the wise plan of our gracious heavenly Father.

All of this grace was given to us in Jesus Christ. We could not earn it; we did not merit it. This is the grace of God!

Christ has defeated death (v. 10). When we are timid it is because we are afraid. Of what are we afraid? Suffering and possible death? Paul himself was facing death as he dictated this letter. But Jesus Christ has defeated our last enemy, death! By His own death and resurrection, Christ has “abolished death” (made it inoperative, taken out the sting). “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (1 Cor. 15:55).

Christ was not only the Destroyer of death (see Heb. 2:14–15), but He was also the Revealer of life and immortality. In the Old Testament the doctrines of eternal life, death, resurrection, and the eternal state were in the shadows. Here and there you find glimpses of light; but for the most part, the picture is dark. But then Jesus Christ shone His light on death and the grave. Through the gospel, He has given us assurance of eternal life, resurrection, and the hope of heaven.

Religious groups that teach “soul sleep” and other strange doctrines usually get their ideas from the Psalms and Ecclesiastes. Instead of allowing the clear light of the New Testament to shine on the Old, they look at the New through the shadows of the Old! If you turn your back on the light of the gospel, you will only cast another shadow and make the scene darker.

“Immortality” (2 Tim. 1:10) means “incorruptibility,” and refers to the resurrection body.

The present body is corruptible; it dies and decays. But the glorified body we shall have when we see Christ will not be subject to decay or death (1 Cor. 15:49–58; Phil. 3:21). In fact, the heavenly inheritance that we share will be “incorruptible, and undefiled, and [one] that fadeth not away” (1 Peter 1:4).

Be not ashamed of the Lord’s prisoner (vv. 11–12). Though a prisoner, Paul was still bearing witness for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Sad to say, the people in Ephesus had deserted Paul in his time of need (2 Tim. 1:15). Many of them could have come to Rome to witness on Paul’s behalf, but they did not. They were even ashamed to be identified with the apostle! It would have made Timothy’s ministry in Ephesus (and in the surrounding cities; see 2 Tim. 4:13) much easier if he had gone along with the crowd, but Paul admonished him to remain true. He gave four reasons why Timothy should not be ashamed of his association with Paul, the prisoner.

Paul was called by God (v. 11). Jesus Christ had met Paul on the Damascus road (Acts 9) and had personally called him into the ministry. Paul was a herald (“preacher”) of the gospel. In ancient times, a “herald” was the official messenger of the king or emperor, and his message was treated with great respect. The fact that professed believers in Asia were rejecting Paul did not change his calling or his message.

Paul was not only a herald; he was also an apostle, “one sent with a commission.” Not every Christian was an apostle of Jesus Christ, for a person had to meet certain qualifications and be chosen by the Lord personally, or through His Spirit (see Acts 1:15–26; 1 Cor. 9:1; 2 Cor. 12:12). An apostle represented Jesus Christ. To reject an apostle was to reject the Lord.

Paul was a teacher of the Gentiles. This meant that he shepherded local churches. It was this word Gentiles that put him into prison in Rome the first time (Acts 22:21ff.). The Gentile believers in Asia should have shown their appreciation of Paul by rallying to his support, for after all, it was Paul who brought them the good news of salvation. But instead they were ashamed of him and tried not to get involved.

Paul was confident in Christ (v. 12). Paul was not ashamed! Why? Because he knew that Christ was faithful and would keep him. Note his emphasis on the person of Christ: “I know whom I have believed.” Salvation is not the result of believing

certain doctrines, though doctrines are important. A sinner is saved because he believes in a Person—Jesus Christ the Savior. Paul had deposited his soul in the care and keeping of the Savior, and Paul was sure that Jesus Christ would faithfully guard that deposit. What difference did it make to Paul what happened on any certain day? What really mattered is what will happen on “that day” when Jesus Christ rewards His servants (see 2 Tim. 1:18; 4:8).

In these difficult days, it is important that we stand true to Christ and be willing to suffer for Him and not be ashamed. We may not be put into prison, as was Paul; but we suffer in other ways: the loss of friends, being bypassed for a promotion, loss of customers, being snubbed by people, and so forth. It is also important that we stand by God’s servants who are suffering for righteousness’ sake.

3. Spiritual Loyalty (1:13–18)

Throughout the centuries God’s work has been done by men and women who stood steadfast in their hours of trial. It would have been convenient for them to have compromised, but they stood firm. Paul was such a man, and he encouraged Timothy to follow his example in a twofold loyalty.

Be loyal to God’s Word (vv. 13–14). God had given the deposit of spiritual truth to Paul (1 Tim. 1:11), and he had given it to Timothy (1 Tim. 6:20). It was now Timothy’s solemn responsibility to “hold fast” (2 Tim. 1:13) and “guard” (2 Tim. 1:14 NIV) the precious deposit of Christian truth, and to pass it along to others (2 Tim. 2:2).

The word form (2 Tim. 1:13) means “a pattern, an architect’s sketch.” There was a definite outline of doctrine in the early church, a standard by which teaching was tested. If Timothy changed this outline or abandoned it, then he would have nothing by which to test other teachers and preachers. We today need to hold fast to what Paul taught for the same reason.

However, note that Timothy’s orthodoxy was to be tempered with “faith and love.” “Speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15) is the divine pattern. How easy it is to become pugnacious in our desire to defend the faith, or a witch-hunter who creates problems.

It was the Holy Spirit who committed the truth to Timothy, and He would help him guard it. Apart from the ministry of the Spirit, we are in the dark when it comes to understanding the Word of

God. It is He who must teach us (John 16:13) and enable us to guard the truth and share it with others.

From the beginning of human history, Satan has opposed God’s Word. “Yea, hath God said?” was Satan’s first word to mankind (Gen. 3:1), and he continues to ask that question. Throughout the history of the church, the Word of God has been attacked, often by people within the church, yet it still stands today. Why? Because dedicated men and women have (like Paul and Timothy) guarded the deposit and faithfully handed it to a new generation of Christians. When a church or any other Christian organization goes liberal, it usually starts with a weakening of their leaders’ convictions about the Word of God.

Be loyal to God’s servant (vv. 15–18). The province of Asia in that day comprised the Roman districts of Lydia, Mysia, Caria, and Phrygia. Paul was forbidden to minister in this area on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:6), but on his third journey, he stayed nearly three years in Ephesus, the capital of Asia, and evangelized the entire area (Acts 19; 20:31). The seven churches of Asia were all in this area (Rev. 1:4, 11).

We do not know who Phygelus and Hermogenes (2 Tim. 1:15) were. It is likely that they were leaders in the church who opposed Paul and would not come to his defense in Rome. You would think that the Asian believers would have stood by Paul, but instead, they were ashamed of him and at the same time (whether they knew it or not) ashamed of Christ (see 2 Tim. 4:16).

It was certainly a dark hour for Paul. Demas had forsaken him (2 Tim. 4:10). His other associates had been sent to distant places of ministry. False doctrines were spreading in the church (2 Tim. 2:17–18). How Paul would have loved to be free to preach the Word and defend the faith—but he was in a Roman prison. It was up to Timothy to get the job done.

But there was one man who dared to leave Ephesus and come to Rome to assist Paul—Onesiphorus. His name means “profit-bearing,” and he certainly was a profitable friend to Paul. It is possible that he was a deacon in the church at Ephesus (“ministered” in 2 Tim. 1:18 comes from the word that gives us “deacon”). During Paul’s ministry at Ephesus, Onesiphorus was a faithful minister, along with his household. Since Timothy had pastored the Ephesian church, he would know this choice saint.

Let me add here that every pastor is thankful for those faithful members who assist him in the work of the Lord. My wife and I have found choice saints in each of the three churches we have served—people whose homes were open to us (and they didn't tell the whole church we were there!), whose hearts felt our burdens and needs, and whose prayers sustained us in difficult times. These believers minister behind the scenes, but the Lord will reward them openly "in that day" (2 Tim. 1:18).

Onesiphorus traveled from Ephesus to Rome and diligently looked for Paul so he might minister to the prisoner's needs. It seemed difficult for him to find his former pastor (2 Tim. 1:17). Perhaps some of the Roman Christians were still opposed to Paul as they had been during his first imprisonment (see Phil. 1:12–17). Perhaps the Roman officials were not cooperative and did not want their choice prisoner to receive any help. In his first imprisonment, Paul was in his own house (Acts 28:30), but now he was in a Roman prison under careful guard.

But Onesiphorus persisted! He located Paul and risked his own life to stand with him and assist him. Some students believe that Onesiphorus was also arrested and possibly executed. They base this on the fact that Paul greeted the "household of Onesiphorus" in 2 Timothy 4:19, but not the man himself. Also, Paul asked for present mercies for the household, but future mercies for Onesiphorus (2 Tim. 1:16, 18).

But the problem is this: If Onesiphorus was dead, then Paul prayed for the dead (2 Tim. 1:18), and we have no authorization in the Bible to pray for the dead.

We have no proof that Onesiphorus was dead when Paul wrote this letter. The fact that Paul asked God to bless the man's household, but that he did not mention the man, simply means that at the time Onesiphorus was not with his household. "When he was in Rome" (2 Tim. 1:17) suggests that, at that writing, Onesiphorus was not in Rome.

Therefore, he was somewhere between Rome and Ephesus, so Paul prayed for him and his household. There was no need to greet Onesiphorus, for Paul had just spent much time with him, so Paul only greeted his household.

Onesiphorus was not ashamed of Paul's chain. The apostle was manacled to a Roman soldier twenty-four hours a day. Onesiphorus could have invented many excuses for staying in Ephesus. But instead he made the dangerous journey to Rome and

ministered to Paul. "He often refreshed me" was Paul's description of this man's ministry. The Greek word means "to cool again." "Bracing me like fresh air" is the way the Amplified Bible translated it. How we thank God for Christians who are "a breath of fresh air" in our hours of trial!

Were it not for Paul's letter, we would never know that Onesiphorus had served Paul and the church. But the Lord knew and will reward him "on that day."

The essentials for a successful ministry have not changed: courageous enthusiasm, shameless suffering, and spiritual loyalty.

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