



2 Timothy

RBS
2 Timothy 1:1-18

Lesson 1: The Ministry of the Gospel and Suffering

“But share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God”
(2 Timothy 1:8b).

Doctrinal Focus: *The proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ is frequently accompanied by suffering and hardship.*

Read 2 Timothy 1:1-18.

Paul writes a second pastoral letter to Timothy¹, his child in the faith (v. 2; 1 Corinthians 4:17), and now the pastor of the church in Ephesus. This was the principal city and seaport of the Roman province of Asia and it was the gateway to the region’s major cities. Situated on the western coast of what is now modern Turkey, Ephesus was no different from other cities, then or now: immorality, violence, and idolatry marred its life. A murderous mob once threatened Paul and his colleagues there (Acts 19:28-34). Ephesus was no place for the fainthearted, and Paul cautions Timothy that he must be prepared to suffer, and, like Paul, be ready to “*endure everything for the sake of the elect*” (2 Timothy 1:8, 2:10), warnings that proved prescient. The day would come when Timothy himself would suffer incarceration for the gospel’s sake (Hebrews 13:23). Suffering and hardship will be his constant companions. Only by God’s power will he persevere.

This letter has a special poignancy. Unlike the comparatively comfortable house arrest described at the end of Acts (28:16, 30), Paul’s situation during this later imprisonment is dire.² Alone, bound in chains, and death imminent, Paul’s tone is urgent (2 Timothy 2:9, 4:6). He longs for Timothy to visit him, and to hurry, before winter makes the Mediterranean unnavigable. If Timothy delays until spring, it may be too late (2 Timothy 4:9, 21). He writes as a dying man to his beloved son in the faith and fellow gospel minister.

Verses 1-2

In our day, we begin a letter by addressing its recipient and conclude with the signature of the sender (e.g., Dear Timothy—the body of the letter—Yours truly, Paul). In the New Testament era, the format differed. First came the name of the sender, followed by the addressee and a greeting. Then came the body of the letter.

Paul identifies himself as “*an apostle of Christ Jesus*” (1 Timothy 1:1). Unlike elder and deacon, the office of apostle is not perpetual, but foundational to the church, the New Israel of God (Ephesians 2:20; Galatians 6:16). Foundations are laid only once, at the commencement of construction. Therefore, the words of the apostles are authoritative, and are to be received not as the word of man but of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Along with the Old Testament Scriptures, they are the sole foundation of Christian faith and practice (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 3:16). Paul is an apostle not by his own choosing, but by the “*will of God*” (2 Timothy 1:1). He holds forth “*the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus*” (2 Timothy 1:1).

In his first letter Paul addressed Timothy as “*my true child in the faith*” (1 Timothy 1:2). Here Paul writes to him again with deep affection as “*my beloved child*” (2 Timothy 1:2). No man shaped Timothy’s faith and ministry more than Paul.

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Paul's greeting consists of three words, common to Greek speakers, but in the hands of God's ambassador, they convey the grand truths of redemption: grace (God's unmerited favor to those who merit condemnation), mercy (God's decision to grant eternal life to those worthy of condemnation and death), and peace (God's admission to covenant fellowship and friendship to those who were once his enemies). Grace, mercy, and peace are divinely bestowed gifts for they come "from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord" (2 Timothy 1:2).

Verses 3-7

The character of a man can be measured by what he chooses to remember. Paul remembers Timothy in his prayers "night and day" (2 Timothy 1:3). He remembers Timothy's tears at their last painful parting, when for the gospel's sake they went separate ways (2 Timothy 1:4; cf. Acts 19:22, 1 Corinthians 4:17, Philippians 2:19). He remembers Timothy's godly heritage, his mother and grandmother, and the "sincere faith" that dwelled in them and now dwells in Timothy (2 Timothy 1:5). And he remembers the day when he, along with the council of elders, recognized Timothy's calling and gifts by setting him apart as a teacher in God's church (1 Timothy 4:16). Timothy must, Paul emphasizes, exercise responsibility and "fan into flame the gift of God" that is in him "through the laying on of my hands" (2 Timothy 1:6). The calling of God does not eliminate but rather motivates human effort as believers are assured that with God's calling and gifting to ministry come the courage and love and self-discipline required to complete their work (2 Timothy 1:8).

The character of Paul can be measured by what he chooses to remember: his and Timothy's mutual faith, love and devotion; the primacy of the gospel ministry to which they were called; the character of a man set apart for gospel work; and the faithfulness of God in equipping his servants for the work of ministry.

Verses 3-7 also display the importance of family heritage in the transmission of faith. By God's grace, Paul, once an enemy of faith (1 Timothy 1:13), now acknowledges with a "clear conscience" the God his faithful ancestors served as they waited expectantly for the promised Christ (2 Timothy

1:3), the very Christ confessed by believing Jews like Lois and Eunice, Timothy's grandmother and mother. A godly heritage is a priceless gift.

Verses 8-14

Timothy believed the gospel and was saved. Now, as a teacher of the gospel, he must guard it tenaciously (2 Timothy 1:14; cf. 1 Timothy 6:20).

Gospel ministry means suffering and hardship for Christ's sake. On the night of his betrayal, the Lord warned his disciples, "A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20). To know Christ is to "share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Philippians 3:10). Therefore, Timothy must not be "ashamed of the testimony of our Lord," the gospel's witness to his sufferings and death, and he must not be ashamed of those who suffer for the Lord's sake (2 Timothy 1:8). Instead, he must willingly "share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God" (2 Timothy 1:8).

The mention of God and his sustaining power evokes Paul's praise. It was God who had acted in grace to save Paul and Timothy and had called them to lives of holiness (2 Timothy 1:9). God's salvation does not depend on the merit of those he saves and calls, but upon his own eternal plan that was there "before the ages began." It rests upon his "purpose and grace" (2 Timothy 1:9). The consummation of God's plan will happen at the appearing of Christ "who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10).

Verse 10 offers a comprehensive view of Christ's achievement. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), God's just punishment upon rebellious human beings. Death is first of all physical; life in this world ends with death. Death is also spiritual, and means separation from the loving presence of God in this world and in the world to come. For the believer, Christ abolished death by bearing the just penalty of sin and, on the cross, fully satisfying the demands of God's justice (2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 3:13). Taken together, "life and immortality" point to the nature of the life God grants the believer. In the present age, he enjoys communion with the Father and the Son (John 17:3). In the age to come, he will enjoy that communion in a resurrection body that

is impervious to corruption (Philippians 3:20-21). Through the gospel, Jesus brings *"life and immortality to light"* (2 Timothy 1:10).

According to God's purpose and grace, Paul *"was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher"* (2 Timothy 1:11). No suffering touches the Lord's servant apart from God's eternal plan, a bedrock truth and consolation to Paul who is persuaded that it is for the gospel that he suffers as he does (2 Timothy 1:12). From personal experience he can reassure one of his churches that *"it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake"* (Philippians 1:29).

In verses 12-14 Paul designates the gospel by three phrases: *"my deposit,"* which is rendered in our translation *"what has been entrusted to me"* (v. 12)³; *"the pattern of sound words"* (v. 13); and *"the good deposit"* (v. 14). Confident that God himself will guard the precious gospel he has entrusted to him, Paul is also confident that Timothy will guard that same gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in them (v.12, 14).

As he guards the gospel, Timothy must remember both God's sovereignty and his own personal responsibility. Timothy will draw strength from both Paul's example of suffering and his confidence that God will guard the gospel he has entrusted to his care until *"that Day"* (2 Timothy 1:12). On Judgment Day, God will pour out retribution on those who persecuted his beloved church, and will vindicate those who endured suffering and hardship for the gospel. God's sovereign protection is all the more reason for Timothy to prove a faithful steward who zealously guards the gospel.

Because the gospel is *"the pattern of sound*

words" (2 Timothy 1:13), it can be stated clearly and precisely. Timothy must strictly adhere to—*"follow"*—the gospel communicated to him by Paul. Only the gospel brings salvation, life, and immortality, and Timothy must take the utmost care not to deviate from it. Faithfulness to the gospel message requires faith in Jesus Christ along with the love that union with Christ produces (2 Timothy 1:13), a love Timothy will desperately need as he commits himself to the spiritual welfare of the gospel's enemies (2 Timothy 2:22-26). The effective gospel servant possesses both knowledge of the gospel and the tenor of life that commends it to unbelieving men and women.

Verses 15-18

Suffering and hardship bring out the best and worst in men. Phygelus and Hermogenes turn away from Paul along with others in Asia (2 Timothy 1:15)⁴. Except for what we learn in this passage, we know nothing of these two men. This is a likely scenario: After witnessing Paul's second arrest, they lose their nerve, and judge him a failure. They abandon both Paul and the gospel.

While Phygelus and Hermogenes turn away from Paul, Onesiphorus turns toward his suffering friend (v. 16-18). A member of the church at Ephesus, Onesiphorus' loyalty to Paul was extraordinary. After Paul's imprisonment, Onesiphorus traveled to Rome and found him. Unlike Phygelus and Hermogenes, he is unashamed of Paul's chains. Paul prays that he and his household will find mercy in the day of judgment (2 Timothy 1:18).

Suffering reveals the character of the man. It was true of Paul, Timothy, and Onesiphorus. It was true of Phygelus and Hermogenes as well. It is true of us all.

Notes

1. Second Timothy is the third and final pastoral letter written by Paul to two young pastors, Timothy and Titus.
2. This Bible study assumes that Paul was released after the imprisonment recorded in Acts 28, and that Paul's second arrest and imprisonment came during a subsequent missionary journey. The Pastoral Letters were written during these missionary labors and imprisonment.
3. v. 12: Translators differ whether the Greek "my deposit" refers to what God has entrusted to Paul, namely the gospel (ESV), or to what Paul has entrusted to God, namely his life (and hence the ASV: *"I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day."*)
4. v. 15: "Asia" refers to the province of Asia.

Suggested Commentary

The Message of 2 Timothy by John Stott (The Bible Speaks Today Series)



2 Timothy Lesson 1

Questions for Discussion

Read 2 Timothy 1:1-18.

1. Why is Paul's letter to be received as the Word of God? Have you believed the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus?
2. What factors made Timothy's ministry difficult? The church today faces hardship as it labors to present the gospel. What are the challenges your church faces?
3. Why are the words "grace," "mercy," and "peace" especially important to believers? How does each word relate to the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ?
4. Identify the people in 2 Timothy 1 who shaped Timothy's faith and life. What persons have been especially used by God to introduce you to Christ and to cultivate your life of faith? Why?
5. The calling of God does not eliminate but rather motivates human effort. How do you know this to be true?
6. Why do suffering and hardship inevitably accompany the preaching of the gospel? What are the sufferings and hardships you have faced? How has the Lord strengthened and encouraged you in adversity?
7. Why might Paul's sufferings tempt Timothy to be ashamed of the gospel? In what circumstances are you tempted to be ashamed of the gospel?
8. In verse 8, Paul commands Timothy to "*share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.*" What would it mean for Timothy to share in suffering for the gospel? What does it mean for you to share in suffering for the gospel?

9. How did God display his power to suffering Paul and Timothy? In your trials, how has he revealed his power to you?

10. Verses 9 and 10 unfold the plan of salvation. That plan was conceived before the ages began. Why is it so important to remember this truth?

11. In verses 12-14 Paul designates the gospel by three phrases. What are they? What does it mean to guard the gospel? Why must it be guarded? What threatens the gospel in your community? What could threaten the gospel in your own heart? Your church?

12. Twice Paul refers to the day of judgment (v. 12, 18). How should knowledge of that coming day change the way you view your life and work?

13. Christian service demands godly character. In verse 7, how is that character described? How did Onesiphorus demonstrate his godliness?

14. (Personal) What are the evidences of godliness in your life? Examine your heart. When should we become concerned that our spiritual well-being is declining? How do we measure our progress or decline in godliness?