

2 Timothy 1: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] 2 Timothy chapter 1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus. To Timothy, my beloved child.

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.

As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois, and in your mother Eunice, and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.

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 gave us a spirit, not of fear, but of power and love and self-control.

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do.

[1 : 3 1] But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, God the good deposit entrusted to you. You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Fagellus and Homogenes.

May the Lord grant mercy to the house of Anesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chains. But when he arrived in Rome, he searched for me earnestly and found me.

May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day, and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus. 2 Timothy was likely the last of the pastoral epistles to be written.

It is also one of Paul's prison epistles, quite likely written during his imprisonment in Rome, described in Acts chapter 28 in the early 60s AD. It is the second letter to Timothy, who here he describes as his beloved child.

[2 : 3 8] Timothy functioned as Paul's sheliac, his apostolic emissary. Functioning as Paul's son, Timothy could represent Paul in various situations. We see Timothy functioning in this way in Corinth, and also in Ephesus, for instance.

Paul had first encountered Timothy during his second missionary journey. Timothy is introduced to us in the text of Acts, in Acts chapter 16, verses 1-3. Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra.

A disciple was there named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

Paul's introduction to the epistle of 2 Timothy is fairly typical. He begins by introducing himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus, and refers to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus.

By this life, he probably means what he speaks of in Titus chapter 1, verses 2-3. In hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began, and at the proper time manifested in his word, through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Saviour.

[3 : 52] Verses 3-5 constitute a single sentence, and it's not immediately clear how the clauses hang together. Does Paul, for instance, explain the reason for his thankfulness? Looking more closely at Paul's statement, we can follow the logic as it works through.

First of all, he expresses his giving of thanks. Such expressions of thankfulness are a common feature of the openings of Pauline epistles. Subordinate to this expression of thankfulness, he speaks of the way that he serves the Lord in common with his ancestors.

Then, he describes the occasion for his giving thanks, as he remembers Timothy constantly in his prayers night and day. He fills this out, talking about the tears of Timothy that he remembers, perhaps the tears of a painful parting.

Remembering those tears, he longs for a reunion, a reunion that would be a great cause of joy to him. In verse 5, we come to the reason for Paul's thanksgiving, which is his remembrance of Timothy's sincere faith.

Paul had begun his statement by speaking of the commonality that he had with his ancestors, in his service of God with a clear conscience. And in verse 5, he also describes the way that Timothy stands in a family line of faith.

[5 : 02] Perhaps in this case, in contrast with Paul's description of himself, not just a faith that straddles the divide with the old and new covenant, but a faith that is explicitly a new covenant faith.

Gerald Bray argues that given the fact that women married so young within the ancient world, Timothy's grandmother Lois could well have been no more than 40 when Timothy was born. It is quite conceivable that she could have come to faith before Timothy's mother, and that they both could have taught Timothy in the Christian faith from his early to mid-childhood.

However, given the fact that in 2 Timothy chapter 3 verses 14 to 15 we read, But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

It is possible that Paul is referring here not to new covenant Christian faith, but to the faith of a devout Jew. In Acts chapter 16 verse 1, we learn that Eunice was a believing Jewish woman.

Timothy, like Paul, stood in a line of believing people, and one of the things that Paul is doing here is reminding him to continue in that tradition, to take those lessons that he learned from his mother and his grandmother, and to run with them himself.

[6 : 18] Paul has earlier spoken of Timothy as his child in the faith, and in verse 6 he reminds Timothy of the role that he himself has played in Timothy's spiritual formation. It was through the laying on of Paul's hands that Timothy received what he calls here the gift of God.

Elsewhere, in 1 Timothy chapter 4 verse 14, we have another account of hands being laid upon Timothy. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy, when the council of elders laid their hands on you.

This verse raises a number of questions. Is it referring to the same or some different event from that described in verse 6 here? Also, what is the gift in view? Is this the gift of the Holy Spirit more generally?

Is it the gift of a particular vocation? Or is something else in view? My inclination is to see these as two different events. 1 Timothy chapter 4 verse 14 relates more to Timothy's vocation in the context of the church at Ephesus.

The verse here concerns Timothy's role as Paul's sheliac, his apostolic emissary. My suspicion is that the gift of God being referred to in both cases is the gift of the Holy Spirit for that particular form of ministry.

[7 : 26] In both cases, Timothy is charged to fan into flame or not to neglect the gift that he has been given. The gift is something that has to be exercised responsibly. There's a danger of quenching the spirit that has been given to us.

Paul's description in verse 6 makes us think of tending to a lamp to ensure that it does not go out. We might also remember the image of Pentecost with the divided tongues of flame descending upon the disciples.

This gift of the Holy Spirit is not to be taken for granted. There is always the danger of grieving the Holy Spirit. As a flame needs to be given fuel in order to continue to burn, so the gift of the Spirit needs to be given the fuel of actual service and activity.

And perhaps above all else, the person exercising this gift needs to return to its source again and again. God is the one who ultimately gives the Spirit, and the person who has the gift of the Spirit that they are tending to will constantly return to God in prayer.

In verse 7, Paul describes the manner of the Spirit that has been given to Timothy, a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. We might remember statements like Romans chapter 8 verse 15, We might also think of the way that Moses charged Joshua, his successor, in places like Joshua chapter 1 verse 9, Have I not commanded you, be strong and courageous, do not be frightened and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

[9 : 04] Timothy, perhaps struggling with timidity, needs to be reminded of the character of the Spirit of God, a Spirit of God that gives even the weak power, that burns with the divine love, and delivers us from the bondage of the flesh, enabling us to exercise self-control.

Living by this Spirit, Timothy will find resources that he lacks in his own human flesh. It is to the power of the Spirit that he must look for the resources that he needs to perform his ministry.

Paul isn't encouraging Timothy to develop his own internal virtue here, so much as to receive a gift that God has given him, and to live in terms of that gift, a gift that empowers him to act in ways that he would not be able to, by the natural human capacity of his flesh.

In contrast to a spirit of fear, is boldness and not being ashamed of the testimony that he has. Acting in the power of the Spirit, Timothy will be able to boast in the sufferings of Christ, and in the sufferings of his servant Paul.

He will be able to share in such sufferings himself. While the surrounding society, which glorified a false form of power, would look down on this and see it as pitiable, Timothy would know the power of God in it.

[10 : 15] Just as his master Christ was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God, so Timothy, living by the Spirit of Christ, will be able to know power even in his weakness and suffering.

Although Paul isn't identifying the gospel with the power of God here, some readers might still discern slight echoes of Paul's statement in Romans chapter 1 verse 16, For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Verses 9 to 10 are another one of Paul's dense statements of the gospel message. Philip Towner observes that there are a series of pairs and contrasts. The first is a pairing, saved us and called us.

Then there's a contrast, not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace. The next pairing is one to do with time. The grace was given in Christ Jesus before the ages began.

The grace has now been manifested through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus. The final pairing concerns the nature of his salvation. He abolished death. He brought life and immortality to light.

[11 : 24] Once again, Paul is highlighting that the initiative for salvation is found in God's action, not in ours. And this initiative is one that dates back from before the ages began.

It's something that's grounded in Christ, not in us. God's purpose before the creation began was to form a people in his Son. Now, in the fullness of time, with the revelation of Christ in the gospel, that purpose is coming to pass.

Many might see here a reference to the election of particular individuals, but I think that would be to miss the redemptive historical force of Paul's point. What has really been elected is Christ.

The fulfilment of this purpose is not the salvation of detached individuals, so much as the formation of the people of the church in Christ. From this eternal divine purpose, Paul draws a straight line to his own ministry.

He was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher of this, and he suffers for this reason. He is not ashamed. Whatever men may think of him, he is serving the God of the universe, and he can stand before him on that great day, accepted and blessed in Christ.

[12 : 31] He also enjoys a confidence in his labours. A great ministry has been committed to him, and Paul knows that despite the limitations of his own powers, his master who committed that charge to him can guard the converts that have been converted through his ministry, and the churches that have been founded by him.

When thinking about Paul's ministry, we can focus upon his preaching and travelling, if we're thinking about the book of Acts, or we can think about his letter writing, if we look at the epistles. But when we look at the beginning of the epistles particularly, and at the end, we get a sense of Paul's ministry as one of prayer for the churches.

He constantly commits the churches that he is serving, and his brothers and sisters and fellow ministers, to the charge of the Lord, trusting him to complete in them what he had started.

In Philippians chapter 1 verse 6, we have a window into this, and I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Paul has entrusted things to Timothy. He has given him a pattern of sound words, a model of teaching that Timothy is to follow, something that was communicated in a pattern of life, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus, and with the gift of the Holy Spirit that empowers the entire mission.

[13 : 43] Having encouraged Timothy in these various ways, Paul ends by giving him some cautionary examples. A number of people formerly associated with Paul had now abandoned him.

The reference to all who are in Asia is probably not a reference to every one of the Christians in the Roman province of Asia, nor is it a reference to all of the church leaders even, but rather presumably to Paul's former associates.

Paul is left without anyone that he can trust in the region. Recognising the way that people can fail or fall away should encourage Timothy to steal himself all the more for the times of testing.

As one of the few remaining associates of Paul, he needs to learn from the example of those who have failed in that regard. Against the backdrop of these disheartening betrayals and abandonments, Paul presents the example of Onesiphorus as akin to a light in his very dark place.

Even when Paul was in prison, Onesiphorus was not ashamed to be associated with him. Indeed, he went out of his way to seek him out. The example of such a man is definitely one to follow.

[14 : 48] A question to consider. What are some of the ways in which we can fan into flame the gift of the Holy Spirit within us?