

CHARGE TO DILIGENT SERVANTS OF CHRIST

Studies in 2 Timothy 1:1-18

Second Timothy is the last letter that Paul ever wrote. The letter is Paul's final farewell. He was in prison because of his faith—jailed for preaching Christ and the resurrection from the dead. Nero was the Roman Emperor; he was the Saddam Hussein of New Testament times—he was a vicious ruler who would go to any extreme to eliminate his enemies. Moms and dads all over the world name use names for their children—like Thomas, and Lydia, and David—why not use *Nero*?

(1:1-2) The ancient way of starting letters, was with the name of the writer coming first. You don't have to wrestle your way through the scroll to find out who is writing. Paul, the writer of the letter, was "an apostle"—one sent by God with a special message. He was not a self-appointed messenger, but was an apostle of Christ "by the will of God."

In verse 1, Paul also talks about *the promise of life*. TV commercials promise keys that can open the door to "the good life"—but what they are talking about—is *material* success—using your credit card to take a trip to a Swiss resort, or a cruise to the Caribbean Islands. The "good life" in our culture is tied to wealth, leisure, recreation, and material possessions.

Paul is talking about *eternal life*—the everlasting life of John 3:16—whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. The life which God promises is "in Christ Jesus"—not in paying allegiance to Buddha; or in making a pilgrimage to Mecca; it's not in honoring the gods of the Athenians; nor in doing so many good deeds. To receive *eternal life*, one must be "in Christ Jesus." Apart from the atonement that comes through faith in the blood of Christ, there is no promise of life with God.

In verse 2, Timothy is reminded that he accepted the Lord's call under Paul's preaching [he is a "beloved son"], and now the Apostle is careful not to abandon this "son" in the faith. The terms "grace, mercy, and peace" convey Paul's prayer for Timothy's welfare.

1. Respect Your Christian Heritage (1:3-7)

Paul appreciated his good heritage, *and so it should be*, for all those who have been brought up in a wholesome Christian environment.

(1:3) Paul's age, and his awareness that death could not be far off, reminded him of some past experiences. He served God with "a pure conscience." Conscience is the faculty within which refers our conduct to a moral standard. It demands that we do right and shun wrong, but it does not give us the proper concepts of right and wrong. We accept the standard of right and wrong by an act of the will—and conscience lets us know if we don't live up to that standard. For the Christian, the standard is the Word of God. By continually rejecting God's truth, we can cause the conscience to become progressively less sensitive to sin. The conscience can be *darkened*, *misled*, *perverted*, and even *seared*—but Paul served God with "a pure conscience"—with utter sincerity and without any mental reservation.

Paul constantly remembered Timothy in prayer. The phrase "without ceasing" ["constantly"/NIV] is a figure of speech. It does not mean that Timothy is never out of Paul's thoughts—but during his frequent prayers, he never fails to mention the needs which Timothy has. The term "without ceasing" is a medical term that is used to describe a hacking cough. Just as a hacking cough repeatedly crops up, so Paul frequently remembered Timothy [and many other friends] in prayer.

Paul served God with a pure conscience as his forefathers did. Paul had come from a long line of God-fearing people—people whose piety had helped to set the stage for his own conversion. Paul's Jewish parents worshiped God according to the light that they had, and Paul was still serving the same God. He had not really introduced a new religion. It was simply that now in New Testament times, God's plan has been completed and fulfilled in Christ.

(1:4-5) Timothy was the overseer of the church at Ephesus. When Paul left the elders at Ephesus (on a visit not too many years earlier), they all "wept sore [freely], and fell on Paul's neck [embraced him] and kissed him" (Acts 20:37).

Paul and Timothy had labored together in the gospel. They had rejoiced together and wept together and prayed together. Their affection for each other was warm and tender, and when the two had parted, there were tears of sorrow. Paul remembered those tears—and now, as the hymn writer says, "Often for each other, flows the sympathizing tear."

Paul also remembered Timothy's "genuine faith." Timothy had a sincere, honest, wholehearted trust in God. It was not what we might call a "strong" faith—the kind noted for its power, but it was a genuine faith—a simple, childlike trust in the essential truths of the Scriptures.

Timothy's mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois had been the major source of his faith. It is true that saving faith cannot be transmitted from parents to children, but parents can lay the groundwork for a sincere faith. They can make going to church services a happy experience. They can see that clothes are ready, that the children are well-rested on Saturday night. They can insist that criticism of church officers is not permitted in the home. Also, parents can read Bible stories to their children in an atmosphere of joy, and can live out their own Christian faith consistently before their children. They can set the tastes of children in the right direction. We think of other mothers—Susanna Wesley, and Monica [the mother of St. Augustine], and countless other mothers and fathers who instructed and prayed for their children.

It is interesting to note that Paul commends Timothy for the fact that his faith is the same as his grandmother's. He did not mind being accused of having an old-time religion. He was glad to sing, "It was good for our fathers; it was good for our mothers; and it's good enough for me."

(1:6) Timothy was to "stir up" the special gift that was affirmed to him through the laying on of the hands of the elders. The gift was *not the gift of gab*; it was not *the gift of getting along well with people*. It was *the gift of clearly communicating the Word of God*. The Greek word translated "stir up" is taken from the figure of a fire and literally means "to fan into flame." No matter how well a

fire is established, or how high the flames rise up—the fire will die down and become glowing embers, unless it is stirred up and new fuel is added. The preacher or teacher who stops learning *ceases to grow*, and listeners will not drink long from a stagnant pool!

(1:7) The gift that God gives is not one of *fear*. We are to have an appropriate fear in the sense of *awe*, but not in the sense of *cowardice*. We are not to fear man, or death, or the future—because the God who created the universe is our shield and defender. With such a God before us, beneath us, beside us, and within us—we should be able to say with the Psalmist, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee" (Psalm 56:3).

Instead of fear, God has given us His power, His love, and a sound mind. *Power* refers to boldness and courage—the capacity to cope with whatever confronts us. *Love* is compassion for people—a deliberate effort on the part of the Lord's disciples to seek the good of other persons, even those who mistreat us. A *sound mind* speaks of balanced judgment. It refers to self-discipline, the determination to act with moderation, and to be reasonable in our conclusions.

2. Faithfully Endure Courageous Suffering (1:8-12)

In these verses the Apostle Paul is describing a great salvation which is worth willingly suffering for.

(1:8) Because of the severe persecution which was being waged against Christians by the Emperor Nero, Paul was in prison. To Timothy, and to others who were a bit fearful, the times appeared dark and uncertain. There was a tendency to be silent regarding belief in Christ. Some were embarrassed to be associated with Paul, especially since he was re-arrested and put into prison a second time. In verse 15 Paul says that some of his former friends had forsaken him, and here he begs Timothy to be courageous, and not do the same as some others had done.

Paul's appeal to share with him in the sufferings for the gospel implies that service for Christ often involves ridicule and reproach. Even in cultures where brutal persecution does not commonly take place—those who live a godly and moral life, and are willing to confront sin and call for repentance—can expect hostility from neighbors and co-workers. Christianity was born on a Cross, and those who march under its banner must bear the stigma and the reproach that goes along with being a Christian. We are not to be ashamed of giving testimony for our Lord Jesus.

(1:9) Paul reminds readers that God has "saved us"—and indeed we have a salvation that is worth suffering for! God's salvation was accomplished through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and salvation is given freely by grace to those who accept it in faith and repentance.

We are wise to notice in verse 9 that salvation is far more than pardon and forgiveness. It includes also the call to a holy life. Christians are saved not only *from* a life of sin, *but to* a life of holiness.

Kay Arthur [*Decision* magazine/June, 2009] comments: "*Does your heart ache when you read the latest polls and find that the church's beliefs and behavior are just a few percentage points*

different from the world's decadent and indulgent practices?...What do you allow your eyes to see, your mind to think, your body to do? Women dress seductively and think nothing of it. Sex outside of marriage is assumed. The word restraint is not in our vocabulary."

She concludes with a call to holy living, and reminds readers that we need to deal with these things, if we are going to be prepared to see Jesus face to face—when He comes to destroy the earth and create a new heavens and earth.

It is okay to use the word "saved"—but the word "salvation" has to be rescued from the shallow concepts that are often associated with it. God not only wants to pardon and bring forgiveness for past sins, but He also aims to progressively transform us into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 9 says that He "has saved us *and* called us with a holy calling."

(1:10) Jesus has *abolished death* (verse 10). Obviously, this does not mean that Jesus *eliminated* death [because people still die], but Jesus robbed death of whatever terror it had—because He was raised from the dead, and He said, "Because I live you will live also" (John 14:19).

Death is an enemy, not a friend—but for the Christian it is our entrance into glory. The Scriptures speak often about the death of believers. Their death is "precious" in the Lord's sight (Psalm 116:15). Death for believers is being carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:22).

- it is going into Paradise (Luke 23:43);
- it is entering a place with "many mansions" (John 14:2);
- it is to be at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8);
- death is "gain"—and is "far better" than life here on earth (Philippians 1:23).

John Bunyan, in *Pilgrim's Progress*, tells how "the timid Christian"—whom he named (*Mr. Fearing*)—knowing that he must cross the river of death some day, approached it with trembling and fear and uncertainty. But when he got to the river of death, the water was only *ankle deep*.

Jesus has *brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*. Jesus not only took the terror out of death, but He brought *life and immortality into full view*. In the Old Testament, there are *hints* about life after death, but now since Christ came, *floods of light* have been thrown upon the subject of the hereafter.

The word *life* [in its setting] refers to time—the here and now. The word *immortality* refers to eternity—the hereafter. Since Christ came, *life* has meaning now, and *immortality* has become much clearer.

(1:11) The word *preacher* means "herald." The preacher is one who boldly proclaims the gospel (the good news)—a message from God.

The word *apostle* means "one who is sent out" as an ambassador, to speak not for himself, but for the one who sends him.

The word *teacher* means "one who instructs the mind." In the New Testament sense, the teacher is one who carefully imparts instruction in the things pertaining to salvation and how to live

for the glory of God.

Preaching is designed primarily to move the will—to exhort to action. *Teaching* is designed primarily to instruct the mind—to transmit knowledge.

(1:12) Because Paul preached God's message, he suffered harsh treatment, isolation from his friends, false accusations, and even imprisonment. Paul could say, "Nevertheless I am not ashamed." He did not wilt with self-pity just because he was in prison. He chose to accept the situation as God's will for him. He had confidence in the Lord's keeping power.

Paul knew that Nero would likely send him to his death, but he also knew that Nero could not wrest his soul out of the hands of the Lord Jesus. He was persuaded that the Lord *would keep His promise to quicken our bodies* on the resurrection morning—and that some day he would stand by the Savior's side.

Notice in verse 12 the significance of the word "whom" instead of the word "what." For Paul, Christianity was not merely enlisting in a cause; it was promising loyalty to a Person. "I know *whom* I have believed."

3. Keep On Striving for Doctrinal Faithfulness (1:13-18)

Those things which Timothy had heard from Paul, he was to faithfully keep and pass along as a sacred trust.

(1:13) The term "sound words" speaks of teachings that are fully in accord with the unadulterated Word of God. Those who preach "sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1) will proclaim a well-rounded message, expounding on all parts of the Word—and let the chips fall where they may.

We are to *hold fast the pattern of sound words...in faith and love*. *In faith* means that we should be thoroughly convinced that what we believe is true. *In love* means that we should hold our beliefs in a spirit of charity, recognizing that others will sometimes disagree.

(1:14) The "sound words" (of verse 13) have been committed to Timothy as a sacred trust. The "good thing" (verse 14) which was committed to Timothy—was the glorious gospel which Timothy was to preach, and the doctrine which he was to preserve. In our day there is an increasing apostasy and a turning away from the plain teachings of God's Word. More and more people are confused.

Multitudes are following strange cults. It becomes the task of church leaders to guard and defend the truth—and it will take the help of the Holy Spirit who "dwelleth in us" to do that (verse 14b).

(1:15) Paul mentions two men (Phygellus and Hermogenes) who have turned away from him. We know nothing more about the two men named here, except that they once were friends—but surely, they were only fair-weather friends. The words, "This thou knowest," indicate that Timothy was aware of the defection on the part of many of Paul's friends.

(1:16-17) Not all of Paul's companions were fair-weather friends. There was at least one exception—a man named Onesiphorus.

This friend was not embarrassed by the fact that Paul was in prison. Onesiphorus had often "refreshed" the aging Apostle. It must have been a joy to be in the presence of this brother. Conversation with Onesiphorus was reinvigorating and stimulating. No wonder Paul felt such a profound sense of gratitude for this brother in the Lord. Verse 17 says that Onesiphorus was so determined to find Paul, and bring encouragement and help—that upon his arrival in Rome, he went all over the city diligently searching for the Apostle.

There were many prisoners in Rome and so it was not an easy task to locate Paul. We try and picture this diligent brother as he threaded his way over unfamiliar streets; as he knocked on doors; as he followed up on every clue—until he finally discovered Paul chained to a soldier in some unknown prison house.

(1:18) Paul prayed that God would grant mercy to Onesiphorus in the great Day of Judgment. Onesiphorus will never be inducted into the Hall of Fame of best-known persons of the Bible, but he is likely one of the favorite Bible characters for many Christians. Everybody needs an Onesiphorus.

Just what Onesiphorus did to *help* and to *cheer* Paul, we are not told. Maybe he brought news to Paul about individuals and churches that had been established by the Apostle. Perhaps he encouraged Paul by re-affirming his belief in God's promises. Maybe he brought food, drink, and literature to the aging Apostle. Anyhow, Paul invoked a special blessing of mercy upon this dear friend, and upon his family (*The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus*, verse 16a)—because of the kindnesses which he had shown Paul.

Paul, who was facing martyrdom, could never repay Onesiphorus himself, and so he asked *the Lord* to repay him in that future Day of Judgment when rewards are handed out.

In Conclusion: The charge to diligent servants of Christ [in 2 Timothy 1] is three-fold in content: 1) Respect your Christian heritage. 2) Faithfully endure courageous suffering. 3) Keep on striving for doctrinal faithfulness at all times.

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