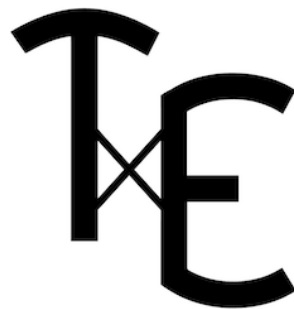




THEOLOGICAL ROUNDTABLE 2023

2 TIMOTHY:
FAITHFUL TO THE LAST



October 17-19, 2023

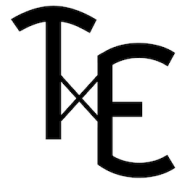
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Theological Roundtable 2 0 2 3



Tom Hall
Shared Life Services, Bedford, Texas

AN INTERPRETIVE OUTLINE OF 2 TIMOTHY

I am following the paragraph breaks in the Christian Standard Bible. In general I will summarize a paragraph with a sentence. In some cases I'll make other observations, ask questions, or explore further details of the paragraph with bulleted sentences.

This is an interpretive outline, not only descriptive, which means I've made choices about the meaning of the book and its parts that may not be affirmed by subsequent papers. My recent study of the text has led me to consider that:

1. Paul is throughout the letter preparing to ask Timothy urgently to come to Rome to see him before he dies.
2. The instructions about the ministry in Ephesus are, therefore, more urgent than I've previously understood them.
3. The role of "faithful men" is also therefore heightened as they are the ones who will carry on without Timothy (but perhaps with Tychicus, 4:12).

I'm using the general outline represented in the Bible Project's [video](#) overview of 2 Timothy. You might find it helpful to view.

OUTLINE

- 1:1 - 2:13 Timothy receives reminders, encouragement, and persuasion to pursue his ministry in Ephesus in a timely manner for Paul's sake and for the gospel's.
- 1: 3-5 Memories of Timothy and his heritage from his godly home prompt Paul's grateful prayers and joyful hopes of seeing him soon. (See 4:)
- vv. 6-7 Paul's own bestowal on Timothy of anointing ("spirit") for the task he now faces supports encouragement for that task.
- vv. 8-12 The glory of the truth about Jesus replaces any shame for imprisonment with the glad embrace of suffering for such glory.
- Timothy must not be ashamed of the message or the messenger.

- Paul has confidence in Christ that displaces the shame of imprisonment or any other suffering.

vv. 13-18 The task before Timothy involves keeping true to the message in Ephesus as Paul has delivered it to him and the Spirit empowers him.

- In Timothy's own region there are teachers contradicting this message, including Phygelus and Hermogenes,
- Timothy and Paul know in common a faithful friend in ministry, Onesiphorus, whom Paul commends.
- Paul seems to draw a close connection between loyalty to himself and to this message.
- Is Paul mentioning Onesiphorus as an example for Timothy to follow in coming to find Paul in Rome?

2: 1-2 With such examples in mind of faithful and unfaithful ministry, Timothy must find strength in God's grace and find other faithful men to carry on the ministry (especially since he, Paul hopes, may be leaving Ephesus soon).

vv. 3-7 This grace-granted strength for inevitable hardship has examples in a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer, who consider difficulty a necessary part of their tasks.

- These examples require further pondering by Timothy and insight from God.

vv. 8-10 Paul commends to Timothy his message, his example, and his hope for the gospel to do its work through his ministry.

vv. 11-13 The hope arises from the death-unto-life shape of the gospel and how it governs the life of those who believe it.

2:14 - 4:5 Timothy and his trainees will have to keep true to the message while dealing with those who oppose and contradict it.

vv. 14-19 Faithful ministry of the truth includes both the content and the manner of teaching so that false doctrine and contentious communication do not harm the church.

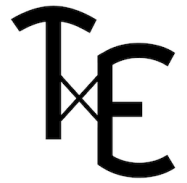
- Might the "wickedness" referred to in v. 19 refer to the contentiousness of the false message as well as its untruth?

- vv. 20-21 To be fit for honorable usefulness in God's house requires ministers to choose both the right message and the right manner, to "purify themselves" for such a ministry.
- vv. 22-26 Any hope of rescuing from destruction those who spread falsity and strife in the church lies in the way its ministers counter contentiousness with reconciliation.
- 3: 1-5 The task will only become harder as societal wickedness increases among people, even affecting the church, and such people are to be avoided rather than pursued for reconciliation.
- Note: CSB actually treats v. 1 as its own paragraph.
 - Might the "form of godliness" refer to pagan notions of piety rather than anything Jewish or Christian?
- vv. 6-9 Devious teachers of the kind described above gain influence in the church through certain church participants, in this case women, whose desire to be "in the know" make them susceptible and, then, destructive to the rest of the church, yet these teachers will not prevail in their designs.
- Paul compares these devious teachers to the magicians of Pharaoh's court whose counterfeit powers were eventually exposed by God's through Moses and Aaron.
- vv. 10-17 Timothy, on the other hand, is equipped and capable of staying his course and resisting the influence of dangerous false teachers.
- He has his long experience as Paul's companion, pupil, and fellow minister.
 - He has the influence of family members and their training him as a boy in the Old Testament scriptures.
 - He has the scriptures themselves and all God has inspired them to accomplish when used well by properly prepared ministers.
- 4: 1-5 Paul issues a final charge to Timothy to persist in his message despite all opposition and in light of the temporary window of opportunity.
- Again, CSB has v. 1 as its own paragraph.

- 4: 6-22 Paul reveals to Timothy his confidence, his feeling abandoned, and his hope for Timothy to come to Rome before he dies.
- vv. 6-8 Paul predicts that his end is near and expresses his confidence that he has done his job well, offering Timothy hope that he can join him in time with the same confidence and reward.
- vv. 9-15 Paul pleads with Timothy to join him due to the few who are with him and others who have left him, to bring him supplies and another companion, and to avoid an enemy of the message.
- vv. 16-18 Despite being abandoned previously, Paul confesses his confidence that the God who has rescued him previously will do so finally and gloriously.
- vv. 19-22 Paul expresses final greetings and his sense of urgency about Timothy's coming.



Theological Roundtable 2 0 2 3



Dudley Hall
Kerygma Ventures, Colleyville, Texas

2 TIMOTHY 1:1

THE PROMISE OF LIFE THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS

This is a paper written for the purpose of discovering the theme of chapter one of 2 Timothy. Considering that this is probably the last of Paul's letters, written while waiting for his execution, his exhortation is as serious as a man's heart can possibly be. I am contending that his theme is expressed in the first verse as he identifies himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus...according to the promise of life in Jesus Christ. It is this life that God has made available for his people that Paul wants to feature. It is worth any suffering that it creates from those who don't yet see. It is steady in the face of death as it has been adequate for everything prior to death. It overflows with confidence in the faithfulness of God. It will do in the sunshine and the rain; in the fun and the pain. It has proven to give contentment in all circumstances. He has found it worth trading all other assets and markers of significance to obtain, as he explained in a letter to the Philippians. He is eager to encourage his friend and son to value it as the supreme gift of God in Christ Jesus. He assures him that any persecution coming his way is another of the blessings that this life offers. It gives another chance to display the glory of the life of Jesus that we share, and that, after all, is why we live.

I will state the theme of this chapter as: *We enjoy the fullness of life as we live trusting the past, present, and future fulfillment of God's promise to his family, all of whom have "son" status.* First we will look at how faith fits into this life that Paul lived and proclaimed. Second, we will learn how faith is born and grows. Third, we examine the first installment of fulfillment of the promise. Then, we will see how his faithfulness stirs our faith to steadiness.

First, the use of the word promise indicates that the core of sharing the life of Christ involves faith. You can't work a promise. You can't achieve a promise. You can't earn a promise. You either believe or you don't. Paul has spent his life declaring and defending this view of life. I'm sure that during some of the father and son discussions he had with his student Timothy, Paul covered what he wrote in His letter to the Roman church, where he goes into depth to show that because all humans rejected the revelation they were given both in nature and in covenant their only hope was for God to do for them what they couldn't do for themselves. They could trust him for that or not. He had often faced the default mode of hearing the gospel through transactional

eyes. It is common to all audiences. The Jews especially had concluded that, privileged as they were to be recipients of the law, they could with enough commitment and will power obey the commands of God. They actually thought they could put God in debt to their obedience and demand his blessings. In fact, they believed that the presence of the temple in Jerusalem was the surefire guarantee of his protection. Simply and fully trusting that Jesus had accomplished all things the law had required for their righteousness was ridiculous and even blasphemous. They had concluded that Paul was a heretic, thus his persecution. Trusting Jesus alone was simply not enough for those who secretly believe there are blessings to be had outside of Jesus' inheritance.

Paul had dealt with this problem in the churches of Galatia. The people were willing to believe that Jesus was necessary, but they weren't sure he alone was enough. They were susceptible to the Jerusalem Judaizers who insisted on holding on the markers of inclusion that had characterized the Jews. They wanted faith but with a little law mixed in. Paul even had a run in with Peter in Antioch over this issue. Peter had been granted the extraordinary experience with Cornelius where he heard God say that it wasn't about Jewish laws of distinction, yet he was swayed by those from Jerusalem saying that righteousness as God's people included making a distinction between Jew and Gentile.

Faith alone in Jesus alone was a problem for Jews.

It was also a problem for Gentiles. All humans are descendants from the couple who were expelled from the garden because of sin. We all are looking for a way back in. After all, we assume that since we are guilty of causing the expulsion, we must be required to find a way to solve the problem. All the various religions of the multiple cultures of the world have in common the belief that we have some obligation to do something to bridge whatever gap there is between us and whatever god there is. Faith alone in Jesus alone is a problem for all humans, both Jew and Gentile.

Yet, the life we are given by the grace of God in Christ Jesus is a life of trusting a person who has done everything necessary to reconcile us to the God who alone rules all things. We not only trust that his work is sufficient, but we trust that he is working in us daily to do with us what he originally purposed before creation. He promised the human race and the devil himself that he would, through human instrumentality, crush the head of Satan. He did. He is. And he shall complete the task and fulfill the promise in total. That is our hope.

Second, true faith as framed by the New Testament is both given and learned. It is clear that Paul recognized the influence Timothy's mother and grandmother had on his faith. He also knew that the things he had shared with Timothy had grounded him and given a channel for his faith to flow. Faith without defined borders can be a mystical fantasy. Knowledge about the object of our faith adds to its depth. For those who have turned faith itself into a god, there needs to be further understanding that it is God as a person

who is the object of faith. The more we can know about him, the more we can know him. We haven't seen him, yet we believe. As our imaginations are filled with the grandeur of his glory, the more we want to know him, and the more we know him, the more we trust him. When contemporaries boast of being people of faith, we wonder what kind of faith and what is the object of faith. The existence of faith is not a marker for being in the family of God.

But faith that is learned is dependent on faith that is born of the sovereign work of God. Paul acknowledges that Timothy has experienced the invasion of a life beyond the mere learning of facts. He refers to a time when he laid hands on him and there was a transaction from heaven between God and Timothy. This indicates a previous inner life that reflects the regeneration of Timothy's spirit. We are aware that we are listening to a conversation between two people who have had many conversations with deep discussions about these things. We aren't able to piece together all the details of what happened on the occasion he mentions. We can't definitively declare that it was the laying on of hands that caused the experience or if it was an accompanying gesture. We do know that Timothy received the promised life in the person of the Spirit of God and faith was the result. Paul is admonishing him to stir what he already has, rather than seek what he does not have. He has been made alive and empowered in the inner man.

That leads us to the third emphasis of this theme. The first installment of the fulfilled promise is the Spirit, who not only regenerates Timothy and all Christians, but grants them the power to love in a way that the world has only seen in the person of Jesus Christ. This unconditional, indestructible love has been bestowed on people of faith, and they are empowered to give it to others. With this gift, believers can do the humanly impossible task of loving enemies, forgiving others' sins, and enduring all types of injustice. It gives believers an otherworldly confidence because it never fails and it always transforms. I'm sure that Paul and Timothy have marveled together many times about this marvelous grace. But that is not all. The spiritual power is sourced in the resurrection, for it is the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead that has come to make the promised life real in the believer. As the fire of this new life is stirred, the mind comes alive with the reality of living daily sharing the resurrection life with the living Jesus. This kind of living is no cowardly approach to survival in the midst of evil and persecution, but a robust demonstration of courage and compassion.

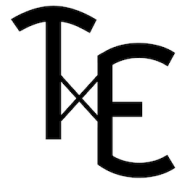
Fourthly, it is the faithfulness of God in completing the fulfillment of his promise that engenders the believer to be faithful to continue to trust him. Paul is confident that whatever God started, he will complete. He is not accustomed to start-up failures. As Paul awaits his day of execution, he does not fear his soon coming appearance before the Judge. Judgment for him has already been settled. He knows the verdict already. It will be a glorious day of vindication for him as he embraces the final installment of his own justification and watches as God the righteous judge makes every wrong right and abolishes all sadness forever. All the martyrs and victims of injustice throughout history will forget their torture in the rapture of his glorious rectification. He didn't

find it difficult to choose to stand for Christ considering what he could see happening very soon. Suffering, pain, persecution, rejection are minor issues when compared to the final justification. A new heaven and new earth will remove all memories of sin's invasion. That day is as sure as the day Jesus was crucified. They are linked and Paul encouraged his son to keep believing until the original promise in the garden was fulfilled on the earth. On the cross, Satan's head was crushed. On that day it will be manifest to all the earth and all the heavens. God keeps his promise. Until that day he is keeping it through his believers as they demonstrate the otherworldly character of faith in Jesus Christ. The kingdom has come. We are in it. When he comes again, it will see the final installment, and it will send us into a spell of praise that will last for eternity.

Truly, Paul was an apostle according to the promise of life in Christ Jesus.



Theological Roundtable 2023



Kerry Freeman
Christ's Covenant Church, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

2 TIMOTHY 2

I have relied on several sources for this paper to include the Pulpit Commentary, Preacher's Homiletic, Wuest's Word Studies, Expositor's Greek New Testament, Word Studies in the New Testament-Vincent, Word Pictures in the New Testament-Robertson

The scripture text is NKJV.

I have adapted Wuest's style in reviewing key words and phrases and then summarizing in paragraph form.

¹ You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

² And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

'You' is used to emphasize Paul's anxiety for the future conduct of Timothy in the Church (Expositor's). 'Therefore' points backward to considerations and appeals in chapter one. 'Son' is used as a term of endearing affection. 'Be strong' means "to be strengthened inwardly". Keep on being empowered, keep in touch with the power, in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Where the power is located (Robertson). That strength is acquired by man's cooperation with God and not merely a passive receiving of an 'influence' from without. (Cp John 15.4). Grace here meaning, 'the unmerited gift of assistance that comes from God.'

'From me' is 'from me personally'. 'Among many witnesses' could refer to those present at Timothy's baptism, ordination or any public occasion where members of the local church were present. Witnesses are those who could testify in a legal matter and not mere spectators only. 'Commit' is "to deposit as a trust." And the word 'faithful' is used in the sense of being trustworthy. 'Able' indicates sufficient. Expositor's notes that Paul is here contemplating apostolic succession in respect of teaching rather than of administration.

In my view, Paul is pressing home the idea that much is riding on this moment in the history and health of the church. Paul is feeling the gravity of the times in which he and Timothy are living and wants Timothy to be aware of what's at stake. So, Paul points his finger at Timothy and says, "You."

I think we would do well to hear again and remember the ‘gravity’ of the moment we are in. I would add in a message on this verse Paul’s emphasis on “therefore” referring to the deposit of the faith as well as the example of Onesimus as an impetus to “be strengthened inwardly.” I would also explore the dynamic of the spiritual father/son relationship and its value and necessity in our day. Lastly, I would address what it means in experience to “commit” these to faithful men; which implies the deposit of a trust and not merely passing information sermonically. Paul encourages Timothy to commit “all” that he has heard from him to faithful men. That should easily fill the preaching/teaching calendar with substantive topics while excluding the need to be novel or deep.

Translation: As for you, therefore, my child, be clothed with inward strength by the grace which is in Jesus Christ; and the things which you have heard from me personally in the presence of many witnesses, these things commit as a trust to trustworthy men who are of such a character as to be adequate to teach others also.

³ *You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*

⁴ *No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.*

The condition of all success is toil; toil which may involve pain. (Expositor’s). “Endure hardness” means to endure hardship together with someone else. Paul is urging Timothy to endure hardships with him. Wuest notes that, “Timothy was a rather timid, reticent young fellow. He was not cast in the heroic mold of Paul. Paul is using the military motive of a soldier. The Roman soldiers suffered hardship in the service of the emperor. Why not the Christian in the service of the King of kings?” “Engaged in warfare” indicates to be on active duty. “Entangles himself with the affairs of this life” means to ‘inweave, entangle with the prosecution of any affair, business, or occupation.’ Or, more clearly, “the pursuits and occupations pertaining to civil life.” “Enlisted as a soldier” is the proper rendering. “That he may please” = that he may be of use.

“You therefore must endure,” leaps out to me as a sermon. The deposit, the message of the gospel, is worth the inevitable hardship and trial. And one way the soldier endures is to not get tangled up in lesser pursuits and obligations. Remaining disentangled may invoke the slander and sneers of “civilians” but, in the day of battle, it is the singularly-focused soldier that is most effective.

Translation: Take your part with others in enduring hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one when engaged in military service allows himself to become involved in civilian pursuits, in order that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.

⁵ *And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.*

Paul changes metaphors for that of a soldier to that of a Greek athlete. “Striveth for the masteries” is ‘athleo,’ “to engage in a contest, to contend in public games.” The victor’s crown was a wreath for his head, woven of ivy, laurel, roses, etc. But the victor does not receive the crown unless he has “competed according to the rules” governing the contest. The Greek athlete was required to spend ten months in preparatory training before the contest. During which, he had to engage in prescribed exercises, live a strictly separated life regarding the ordinary and lawful pursuits of life, and he was placed on a rigid diet. Should he break the training rules, he would be a ‘castaway’ (1 Cor. 9.27) and disqualified from participating in the contest. See also 1 Timothy 1.8; 1 Cor. 9. 7-27.

Continuing the theme of endurance of hardship, a good message could center on the long, lonely and difficult hours of preparation away from the race track and the roar of the crowd. It is in the private hours where the man trains and disciplines himself or where he neglects his training; perhaps even wasting precious hours where he could be transformed into an elite athlete. Of course, this means weaning one’s self from the world which demands immediate gratification as well as confronting procrastination which delays the requisite process to becoming an elite athlete.

Translation: And if a person contends in the games, he is not crowned as the victor unless he engages in the athletic contest according to the prescribed rules.

⁶ The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops.

Paul now uses the figure of a farmer. A tiller of the soil. “Hardworking” or laboring means to grow weary, exhausted, to labor with wearisome effort, toil.” “Must” suggests “it is necessary in the nature of the case.” The farmer must be the first to partake of the fruits. Vincent says, “His is the first right to the fruits of his labor in the gospel.” (Compare 1 Cor. 9.7) “Let not Timothy think to shirk labor and yet enjoy its fruits.” (Pulpit Commentary)

Note the context here is that Paul is urging a “temper of other-worldliness” versus focusing on temporal profit from their spiritual labors. Do words like “hardworking,” and “laboring with wearisome effort till exhausted,” describe our work ethic as ministers of the gospel?

It’s okay to enjoy the fruit of your labor; but labor you must.

Translation: It is a necessity in the nature of the case that the tiller of the soil who labors with wearisome effort, be the first to partake of the fruits.

⁷ Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.

“Consider” is to “perceive with the mind, to understand, think upon, ponder, consider.” Expositors says, “Grasp the meaning of these three similes... if you have not sufficient wisdom to follow my argument, ‘ask of God who gives to all men liberally’ (James 1.15).” Timothy was to live a rugged, strenuous Christian life in which hardships as the result of serving the Lord Jesus was an expected thing. Timothy should live a life of rigid separation; even from good things that would make him unfit for service. Timothy is reminded that the Christian worker who labors with wearisome effort in the Lord’s service, has the right to derive financial support from it, so that he might be able to give all of his time and strength to his work.

The point of the three pictures is that it is absolutely essential that Timothy (and we) be wholly given up to the ministry which he has received.

Translation: Grasp the meaning of that which I am saying, for the Lord will give you understanding in all things.

⁸ Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, ⁹ for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained. ¹⁰ Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Per Expositors, these words form the conclusion of the previous paragraph rather than the beginning of a new one.

Remember Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, Himself Man (1 Tim. 2.5), is the ideal soldier, athlete, and field-laborer; and yet an example to us. Wuest makes an important point here. “It is not the resurrection as a doctrinal fact that Paul has in mind, but the resurrection as a personal experience of Jesus Christ, the reward He received, His being ‘crowned with glory and honor, because of the suffering of death’ (Heb 2.9).” The incarnation and resurrection of Christ were two truths especially endangered and even denied by false teachers. And yet these same truths enabled Timothy to remain steadfast in his testimony to the gospel, even in suffering for it. “Remember Jesus Christ raised from the dead.” (Raised and still alive-Vincent)

The seed of David and the resurrection point to His human nature along with His glorified nature.

Evildoer (malefactor), refers expressly to the *flagitia*, for which the Christians were condemned under Nero. Flagitia= disgraceful, shameful action; an outrage. The Word of God has not been bound and that means it is not shackled today. “Therefore,” is because I know God is carrying on his work. Therefore, I endure afflictions that accompany the preaching the gospel that souls may be saved.

The elect (“to pick out”), are those who, in the providence of God’s grace, are selected for spiritual privileges with a view directly to the salvation of others and themselves.

A simple message, but a grand theme: Remember Jesus Christ! He is the ideal soldier, athlete and field-laborer! And He is our example.

Another message: The Word of God is not chained! Therefore, I endure...

Translation: Be remembering Jesus Christ raised out from among the dead, from the seed of David according to my gospel, in which sphere of action I am suffering hardship to the extent of bonds as a malefactor. But the Word of God has not been bound, with the present result that it is not shackled. Because of this I am enduring all things for the sake of the selected-out ones, in order that they themselves also may obtain salvation which is in Christ Jesus, together with eternal glory.

¹¹ This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. ¹² If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. ¹³ If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.

“Faithful is the saying.” We might say, “The proverbial statement,” or “an old adage.” It is referring to the previous verse which speaks of the eternal glories of those who are saved, which encourage us to endure suffering for the sake of the gospel.

“For” reinforces the teaching. “If” is the particle of a fulfilled condition. The sense of the phrase is “in view of the fact that we died with Him,” a past fact, not a present condition. (Compare Romans 6.1-10 in terms of identifying with Christ in His death and resurrection. We shall live by means of Him.)

“Endure,” suffer, persevere in and under trial and hold to one’s faith in Christ.

“Reign” means to reign as a king, referring to the saints as reigning with Christ in the kingdom.

“He will also deny us.” Will not acknowledge us as His own (Vincent). (See Luke 9.29; Matt 10.33) “If we believe not,” are faithless, refers to being unfaithful. The idea being, ‘if we are untrue to the Lord Jesus in our Christian lives.” Yet He, Christ, remains true to his own nature and righteous character, according to which He cannot accept as faithful one who has proved untrue to Him. To do so would be to deny Himself. Apparently, some were denying Him and were unfaithful.

I would speak on the topic of what it means to “live” with Him. There has been so much emphasis on dying to ourselves that we’ve lost sight of what it means to live with

Him now. Thus, many miss the beauty, the power, and the joy of “life more abundantly.”

Translation: Trustworthy is the word. For in view of the fact that we died with Him, also we shall live by means of Him. If, as is the case, we are persevering, we shall reign as kings with Him. If, as is the case, we are denying Him, that One will deny us. If, as is the case, we are unfaithful, that One remains faithful, for to deny Himself He is not able.

¹⁴ Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers.

‘These things’ refer to verses 11-13; to the issues of life and death.

“Strive about words” is to contend about words; to wrangle about trifling matters. “Profit” = useful. “Subverting” is to turn over, turn under,” as the soil with the plow, meaning “to overthrow or overturn.”

This is critical instruction concerning how to navigate daily discourse. It is okay and often necessary to walk away from such foolish conversation which does not edify but tends to discourage if not dismay those engaged in it. The word “ruin” carries the connotation of disintegration. When a building is in ruin, the structure has broken down, or, disintegrated. The same can happen to the heart of man who persists in useless debate. It can dispirit the man, and perhaps devastate his faith.

Translation: These things constantly be reminding (them), charging (them) in the presence of God not to be continually wrangling about empty and trifling matters, which results in not even one useful thing, since it ruins those who hear.

¹⁵ Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

“Study” is “to make haste, to exert one’s self, give diligence.” Be eager to present (show) yourself unto God; to show the quality which the person exhibits.

“Approved” means “to put to the test for the purpose of approving, and finding that the person meets the specifications laid down, to put one’s approval upon that person. A workman approved is a workman who has been put to the test, and meeting the specifications, has won the approval of the one who has subjected him to the test.

“Do your best to present yourself to God, approved.”

“That needs not to be ashamed” is “a workman who has no cause for shame when his work is being inspected.”

“Rightly dividing” = “to cut straight,” perhaps derived from the stone mason’s cutting stones straight to fit into their places in a building. Again Vincent, “The thought is that the minister of the gospel is to present the truth rightly, not abridging it, not handling it as a charlatan, not making it a matter of wordy strife, but treating it honestly and fully, in a straightforward manner.”

It is vital that we allow and even insist that our understanding of truth and the message of the gospel be inspected, questioned, challenged and evaluated. There’s simply too much at stake to avoid the process of the “testing” of what we believe, preach and practice. None of us wants to lead people to believe and embrace a false gospel that undermines the truth or is destructive to the hearer.

Translation: Bend your every effort to present yourself to God, approved, a workman unashamed, expounding soundly the word of the truth.

¹⁶ But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. ¹⁷ And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, ¹⁸ who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.

“Shun,” avoid. “Profane” = common, unhallowed as opposed to that which is set apart as to its use for God. “Vain babblings” indicates “empty, hollow,” and which yields no return. Vain babblings are not merely empty words, but because empty, become filled with evil, and so become words of evil content and purpose.

And this increases or advances to more ungodliness which is the opposite of a holy reverence or respect for God. “Their words, message will spread like a cancer or sore. A word that means “to gnaw, eat”; *will have pasturage and so grow*; a disease by which the any part of the body suffering from inflammation becomes so corrupted the evil continually spreads, attacks other parts, and at last eats away at the bones.” That is, unless a remedy is soon applied. Hymenaeus and Philetus were of this ilk, that is, false teachers.

I wonder how much quieter the world would be if we heeded this admonition. Maybe that’s why it’s so hard to do. We like and need noise. But the consequence of ignoring the admonition opens the door towards increased ungodliness. And isn’t that what we’re trying to avoid?

Translation: But with reference to unhallowed and empty discussions, give them a wide berth, for they will progress to more impiety towards God, and their word will spread as does a gangrene, of whom are Hymenaeus and Philetus, the very ones who are of such a character as to have deviated from the truth, saying that the resurrection already has taken place, and are overthrowing the faith of certain ones.

¹⁹ Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

"Nevertheless" connects the mention of the defection of some from the truth with the fact that "the foundation of God stands sure." The thought being that the Church has an ideal integrity unaffected by some who seemed to belong to it (Expositors). (cp. 1 John 2.19)

This firm foundation, Expositors defines as the Church, "The Church as existing in the divine knowledge, not as apprehended by man's intellect, *is the firm foundation of God* i.e., that which God has firmly founded.

"Firm" = immovable. "Stands" =stands permanently. It is able to withstand the assaults of error.

"Having this seal," they are marked by God so as to be recognized by Him as His; and this mark serves as a perpetual reminder to them that 'they are not their own, and of their constant obligation to holiness of life (1 Cor. 6.19-20). Vincent, "There are two inscriptions on the foundation stone, the one guarantees the security, the other the purity, of the Church." These two inscriptions should be taken together.

"Names the name" is to acknowledge and appropriate what the name involves, as a confession of faith and allegiance.

Even though there are many who engage in such foolish and hollow conversation, the Lord knows and has sealed or authenticated His own by His Spirit (Eph 1.13). And it is these who must depart from iniquity of every sort to include the sin of "profane and idle babblings."

Translation: However, the immovable foundation has stood and at present stands, having this seal, The Lord knows those who are His, and, let those who name the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness.

²⁰ But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. ²¹ Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.

In this verse, Paul is referring to the visible organized Church on earth made up of saved and unsaved. 'Foundation' indicates the inward, essential character of the Church, 'house' expresses its visible, outward aspect. "Vessels" = any household equipment or furniture. "Honor" = the estimated value of a thing. "Dishonor" = disgrace

or contempt. "Purge" = 'to avoid defilement and so keep one's self pure.' So, Timothy, separate yourself from communion with these vessels of dishonor.

"Sanctified" = to set apart for the worship and service of God. "Prepared" = equipped.

Is it possible Paul is alluding to Phygellus and Hermogenes when he speaks about vessels of dishonor?

Be careful, Timothy, with whom you keep company. To be sure, you will be misunderstood and perhaps rejected by those who lead impure lives even while participating in the visible life of the church. To be useful for the Master, you must avoid anything that would defile your heart with their attitudes, values, and profane babblings. In some cases, it is painful to separate from people you care about; but essential for the greater cause which is to be useful for the Master.

Translation: Now, in a great house there are not only instruments of gold and of silver, but also of wood and baked clay, also some which are highly prized and others which are treated with contempt. If, therefore, a person separate himself from these, he shall be an instrument highly prized, in a state of permanent separation, useful to the master, for every good work equipped.

22 Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

"Lust" = a craving, a passionate desire, good or evil, depending upon the context. Expositor's, "Timothy had just been cautioned against errors of the intellect; he must be warned against vices of the blood."

"Pursue," a stronger word than follow. "Faith" = faithfulness in the sense of fidelity, trustworthiness. "Charity" = "the love which God is and which is produced in the heart of the yielded saint by the Holy Spirit, a love that impels one to sacrifice one's self for the benefit of the object loved." (Wuest)

Timothy, you must run away at the first hint or inclination towards youthful lusts to include the cravings for power, privilege, prestige, and illicit sexual pleasure. These have ruined many. You mustn't even entertain or flirt with such notions. To do so could lead to a heart overthrown and disabled for the work of our Lord. Samson provides a clear example. Run!

Pursue, chase down righteousness, etc. These are precious jewels, attributes worth attaining. These are the true riches for which you should crave.

Translation: The passions of youth be constantly fleeing from, but be pursuing as

constantly, righteousness, faithfulness, love, peace, in company with those who are calling upon the Lord out of a pure heart.

²³ But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.

“Foolish” = dull, sluggish, stupid. “Ignorant” = unlearned, untrained, uninstructed.

Engaging in such drivel only leads to unnecessary, contentious moments with others and diminishes the beauty of the jewels mentioned above.

Translation: But stupid questionings, and questionings that come from an uninstructed and undisciplined mind refuse, knowing they constantly beget contentions.

²⁴ And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, ²⁵ in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, ²⁶ and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

“Servant” = a bondsman of the Lord, referring here primarily to the pastor. “Must” is a necessity in the nature of the case. There is a moral obligation to this duty. “It is not necessary for him to fight.” (Robertson)

“Gentle” = mild, gentle (in demeanor). “Apt to teach” = skillful in teaching. “Patient” = patient of ills and wrongs, forbearing. “Correcting,” = schooling.

“Those that oppose themselves” = those who place themselves in opposition to the true servant of the Lord and to true doctrine. Deal with these tenderly and considerately as those who err from right living. (Expositor’s)

“Snare of the devil,” “They have been caught while mentally intoxicated in the devil’s snare.” (Robertson) See 1 Timothy 3.7. “Having been taken captive by him,” i.e., the devil.

“That they may come back to soberness to do the will of God.” (Robertson)

In wrapping up this section of scripture, Paul summarizes how to approach life with others. Don’t fuss with folks. Instead, be gentle and patient. Correct where necessary in humility. The hope is they will find repentance, know the truth and escape the snare of the devil.

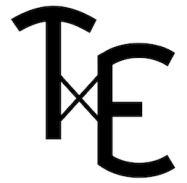
Translation: And the Lord's bondsman must not be in the nature of the case quarrel, but be gentle to all, skillful in teaching, forbearing, in meekness correcting those who set themselves in opposition, if perchance God may give them repentance, resulting in a precise, experiential knowledge of the truth, and that they may return to soberness out of the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him, (so as to serve) the will of that One (God).

NOTE: LIST OF POSSIBLE SERMON TOPICS

1. You, therefore (since, because of), my son (explore the relational dynamic), be strong (why?)
2. All you have heard from me
3. Commit to faithful men
4. Separate yourselves
5. Remember Jesus Christ was raised from the dead (the problem of forgetting, as well as the implications of the resurrection)
6. An old adage...This is a faithful saying
7. Remind them of these things
8. Be diligent to present yourself to God...
9. Cancers in the church
10. The Lord knows them that are His
11. Depart from iniquity (the command to do so, the dangers of iniquity, the iniquity of error, its consequence, the way of escape)
12. Useful for the Master
13. Flee, pursue, avoid...
14. A servant of the Lord (his character, his call, his concern [that those ensnared by the devil may escape to do the will of God])



Theological Roundtable 2023



Brian Fields
Grace Fellowship of Augusta, Augusta, Georgia

2 TIMOTHY 3

2 Timothy 3 continues Paul's preparation of Timothy to endure the hardships of ministry and remain faithful to his calling, even though Paul won't be with him much longer. The chapter begins with descriptions of Timothy's current culture and opponents, and ends with the examples that Timothy has to follow. This chapter will be handled in two sections: verses 1-9 and 10-17. Though these divisions are obviously debatable, this seems most expedient for this context. Both passages relate heavily to the verses that precede and follow and possibly should even include them. However, the given assignment is chapter 3 and comment will mostly be limited to that.

2 TIMOTHY 3:1-9

Verse 1 opens with a contrasting conjunction that ties it to the preceding verses. As Kerry has already highlighted in his paper, the closing verses of chapter 2 address how Paul generally desired Timothy to be gentle and patient, correcting people with humility, in the hope that they might come to repentance and escape the snare of the devil. However, there is some distinction between the quarrelsome people of chapter 2 and the corrupt minded and disqualified men of chapter 3. These people who will show themselves during the "times of difficulty" which come in the "last days" are meant to be avoided. This seems to show less of a concern with reaching them, and more of a concern of not being influenced by them while also protecting others from them. Determining the difference between these two types of people, is one of the important interpretive issues in this passage. We will look at it more closely in v. 5.

One of the initial interpretive issues of this passage is the determination of what Paul means by "last days". This term (and others like it) are commonly used by Paul and other biblical authors. The way various readers would interpret this term will probably be tied very closely to their understanding of eschatology. Without going too far into a broader discussion of eschatology or a biblical survey of the terms for "last days," the focus here will be on the internal clues from within this passage. First, though verses 1-5 are primarily written in the future tense, the end of verse 5 transitions to the present. That change in verse 5 comes in the form of a command to Timothy to "avoid such people". This reveals that even though Paul expects a future fulfillment of the verses that follow, he also acknowledges that Timothy is currently dealing with the people he

is describing.¹ Therefore, a purely futurist interpretation doesn't seem to fit with the context. Paul is writing to Timothy about people he is currently engaging with, and thus events that Paul is expecting to play out in the near future.

Second, the "difficult times" of verse 1 can be understood in the sense of "seasons".² *Kairos* can carry the sense of a period of time, more than just a moment. In addition, it is in the plural which suggests that there will be multiple "times". Furthermore, there is nothing in this passage that would preclude the possibility (if not the likelihood) of similar seasons of difficulty coming throughout church history.³ However, if that is the case, it seems consistent to conclude that future seasons should be expected to share a similar outcome. Therefore, regardless of how we might be inclined to interpret Paul's understanding of the "last days", in this passage it has to include Timothy's present circumstance, because Timothy is given present commands within it.

Verses 2-4 are a list of 18 vices that characterize the unregenerate people of this particular season Timothy is in. Lists of vices and virtues are common in Paul's writings and this list bears great similarity to Romans 1. Though it is plausible that this list is meant to be a specific description of the situation in Ephesus⁴, it is just as likely that it is a general description of fallen humanity as Paul has observed it throughout his life and ministry. The "appearance of godliness" could also suggest that these vices have masqueraded their way into the church. In that case, the vices of the world becoming operative in the church would indeed be a significant problem to face. Guthrie is of the opinion that the first two items (lovers of self and lovers of money) are the key to the whole list.⁵ Without question, misplaced love is the root of all of these vices. However, Yarbrough seems just as plausible with his assessment that this is a spontaneous list generated by "a sweeping glance across the barren moral landscape of natural lives untouched by the vivification of God's saving and transforming work."^{6 7} Perhaps the most remarkable thing about this list, is how unremarkable it is. After 2000 years, it seems that humanity's lostness looks astonishingly similar.

Verse 5 concludes the list by addressing the appearance of religion. This verse could be a summation of the previous vices, but there is nothing that requires that conclusion. The real warning here, is that in the midst of all these godless vices, there can still be an appearance of religious commitment. That commitment is illegitimate, because it has denied the power of God to change them. Godliness is only possible through the Gospel's power to change a life and deliver it from vice to virtue. Whatever religious

¹ Mounce, W. D. (2000). *Pastoral Epistles* (Vol. 46, pp. 543-544). Word, Incorporated.

² Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). In *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 497). University of Chicago Press.

³ Stott, J. R. W. (1973). *Guard the Gospel the message of 2 Timothy* (pp. 82-83). InterVarsity Press.

⁴ Hughes, R. K., & Chapell, B. (2000). *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: to guard the deposit* (p. 222). Crossway Books.

⁵ Guthrie, D. (1990). *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary* (Vol. 14, pp. 174-175). InterVarsity Press.

⁶ Yarbrough, R. W. (2018). *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (D. A. Carson, Ed.; p. 404). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos.

⁷ Both Towner and Yarbrough have good sections defining all 19 items.

activity these people are participating in, their lives are not being transformed by the Gospel.

Verse 5 concludes with a command: “Avoid such people”. The particular use of this word for ‘avoid’ is different from the word translated ‘avoid’ in 2:16, and is used only here in the NT. This may suggest an intended stronger shunning than Paul calls for elsewhere in his letters, but it’s hard to be certain.⁸ Regardless, this command stands in stark contrast to the closing comments of chapter 2 where patience and gentleness in correction and teaching are encouraged. Why the difference? From the verses that follow, it appears as if the distinction lies (at least in part) with these people’s potential to disrupt lives and lead others astray. The command to avoid such people seems to be protection to both Timothy and the church he has charge over. As believers, we must carefully distinguish between those whom we may be influencing towards the gospel, and those who are influencing us towards the world.

Verse 6 does seem to reveal the reason for the command: A subset of men from among these vice-ridden people are causing turmoil. They “creep” in, that is, they try and move in silently and without setting off alarm. And they tend towards a particular target: “weak women” (a term used only here in the NT). It seems important that we do not see this passage as addressing women in general, as Paul has previously applauded the faith of women in the opening verses of this letter (1:5). Instead, it is either addressing a particular type of woman, or possibly even some specific women that Paul is already aware of. In 1 Timothy 5:11-15, Paul has already instructed Timothy concerning younger widows. He regards their potential idleness as a problem, and prefers the thought of keeping them busy. They are described as “going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not (1 Tim 5:13)”. It seems likely it is these same women who are being referred to here, except now they are coming under the influence of opportunistic men with nefarious motives.⁹ Because of the specificity of the description in 6b-7, it seems plausible that Paul has some very specific women in mind, being affected by some specific teachers. Women that he felt to have been exposed to the truth, but who have not comprehended it. They were among the church, but unregenerate and falling prey to the false teachings that Timothy was warned in Paul’s first letter.

Furthermore, the “households” that these corrupt men are sneaking into need not be seen as single-family units. In a setting where the church met in homes, an invaded household could affect many more than one family unit. It could affect everyone who fellowshiped within that house. That was the problem with the younger widows in the first place. They were moving house to house and stirring up trouble. That is a way for bad influence to grow exponentially. This scenario adds further potential for

⁸ Mounce, W. D. (2000). *Pastoral Epistles* (Vol. 46, pp. 548–551). Word, Incorporated.

⁹ Towner, P. H. (2006). *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (pp. 561–569). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

trouble. It also gives understanding to Paul's warning to "avoid" such men, as they may have been affecting the very life of the church.

Paul describes these men as "corrupt of mind" and "disqualified regarding the faith". These are strong terms that might even suggest reprobation. If that is the case, it explains why these men are to be avoided and that the real goal is to protect others from them. This would also explain the distinction between those he is to gently teach (according to 2:24-26) and these he is commanded to avoid. But even if reprobation is not in mind, there is at least a call for discernment. There are those we must gently and patiently contend for while there are also those we avoid and attempt to keep away from the flock of God.

Paul's vigorous warning, however, ends with some prophetic good news for Timothy. Regardless of how it may otherwise appear, the folly of these faithless teachers will not get far before their error becomes obvious. These could likely be the focal point in this passage! Timothy is being encouraged to endure and persist, because he has the sure knowledge of the limited reach of error and the sure victory of truth. This should be great encouragement to a soldier in the thick of battle!

As illustration, Paul compares these men to the magicians of Pharaoh that opposed Moses. Though their names are not recorded in the Scripture, their being named in the Talmud must have been sufficiently well known that Paul felt no need to give further explanation to Timothy about who they were.¹⁰ These magicians were able to match the first three miracles of Aaron: the staff to a serpent, the plague of water to blood, and the plague of frogs (Exodus 7 and 8). However, that was the extent of their power and reach. After that point, they were exposed for their lack of power and even testified of the power of God on Moses and Aaron (Exodus 8:19). Likewise, Paul prophetically declares that Timothy's opponents would only be able to advance so far. After that point, the folly of their error would be obvious to all. Paul's assurance of the victory over evil must have been a great comfort and motivation.

Stott contends that the rise and fall of false teachers is a pattern, likely to be repeated time and again throughout church history. Men and false teachings will arise and seem to prosper, only to be revealed for their error and cast aside. Stott says, "This is a clear lesson of church history. Numerous heresies have arisen, and some have seemed likely to triumph. But today they are largely of antiquarian interest. God has preserved his truth in the church."¹¹ That should serve as encouragement to every believer contending for the faith!

Though there may be numerous ways to preach this passage, it seems the sure victory of the truth to be the focal point. It is so easy to get overwhelmed and unduly fixated with the evil around us, and Paul is aware that Timothy is facing extensive evil. Paul's

¹⁰ Knight, G. W. (1992). *The Pastoral Epistles: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 435). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

¹¹ Stott, J. R. W. (1973). *Guard the Gospel the message of 2 Timothy* (p. 91). InterVarsity Press.

list reveals that he is perfectly aware of the vices that surrounded him. In addition, Paul wants to make sure Timothy is aware of those who might even infiltrate the church with those godless ways. It does seem, that Paul has some specific people and circumstances in mind when he warns of those who “creep” in. However, even though Paul wants Timothy to be cautious about these vices and those who promote them, Paul doesn’t want there to be any fear, discouragement, or undue fixation on evil. Though the opponents of the truth might make some advances and though they might lead some weak-minded people astray, they will only have limited success. That being the case, it is best not to let undue attention be drawn to evil and it’s practitioners.

Here are Paul’s directions:

- Be aware that evil people like this will be around, driven by a disordered love.
- Avoid them when possible, especially protecting the church from their influence.
- However, don’t think for a minute that they will persevere or win!
 - God has already put a limit on their reach.
- Therefore, don’t live life overly focused on the evil and the evil men who oppose the truth.
 - There are much better things to focus on.
 - things that will transform.
 - and the following verses will speak to them.

Likewise, these verses could be used to make other points:

- They could be as a case study for how disordered passions lead to evil. And how the commitment to those disordered passions can even bear all the hallmarks of religious commitment.
- They could be used as an illustration of how just because people have followers, does not mean that they are worthy of following. Those who crept into houses had adherents, but they were not worthy of devotion because they were motivated by self-service.

2 TIMOTHY 3:10-17

Verse 10 begins with a contrasting conjunction that is meant to put the following verses in distinction from the previous. The ESV translates that opening conjunction in verse 10 as “you, however.” Interestingly, the same conjunction is used to begin verse 14,

except the ESV translated it there as “but as for you.” In both instances, Timothy is being put in juxtaposition to the vice-riddled false teachers of vv. 1-9. Paul does this twice to emphasize his high opinion of Timothy by explicitly pointing out the differences.

The primary reason that Paul considers him to be different is because Timothy has been a good disciple. The word “follow” in verse 10 is a common discipleship word. According to Kelly, “follow” should be viewed as “. . . a technical term defining the relation of a disciple to his master and can be paraphrased ‘at close quarters,’ ‘follow in spirit,’ ‘carefully note with a view to reproducing,’ and so ‘take as an example.’”¹² Paul is commending Timothy for the fact that he has already followed the example of his teachers. Paul will first list himself as a teacher. Then, in verse 15 he will reference those who taught him from childhood, which would include his mother and grandmother (and possibly others)

The first teacher that Paul mentions is himself. Paul commends Timothy for following his example with reference to nine virtues. Notice that Timothy is being described as already following in these ways. He is being encouraged to continue, not cajoled to begin. Each of the first seven are singular and modified by “my”. Knight suggests that this list is describing two primary aspects of Paul: “. . . his ministry (teaching, conduct, and purpose) and his life (faith, patience, love, and perseverance).”¹³ This would leave the last two as somewhat distinct, possibly even being a further description of what he means by the seventh virtue, ‘steadfastness’. Towner suggest that the last two are actually what Paul most wants to highlight, given the fact that they are plural and the only ones illustrated with examples.¹⁴ Considering the content of the following verses, this is a probable conclusion.¹⁵ Mounce points out that: “Almost every virtue that follows in v 10 appears elsewhere in [Paul’s letters] in an admonition to Timothy, either using the same word or the same concept (cf. especially 2 Tim 1:7; 2:2, 22, 24; 1 Tim 4:12; 6:11), and often is a characteristic that the opponents lack.”¹⁶ So, these virtues are not new to Timothy.

The emphasis of these verses is about far more than simply absorbing information. Mentoring and disciple-making don’t merely involve imparting a body of information but most vitally entail modeling of one’s convictions in real life.¹⁷ For a disciple, more is caught than taught. Observing the truth of the Word as it was fleshed out in the life of Paul is the emphasis here. Timothy is being commended for paying close attention to Paul’s life, and then modeling his own after the ways Paul has followed Christ well.

¹² Hughes, R. K., & Chapell, B. (2000). *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: to guard the deposit* (p. 231). Crossway Books.

¹³ Knight, G. W. (1992). *The Pastoral Epistles: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 439). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

¹⁴ Towner, P. H. (2006). *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (p. 572). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

¹⁵ Both Towner and Yarbrough give helpful definitions of these lists.

¹⁶ Mounce, W. D. (2000). *Pastoral Epistles* (Vol. 46, p. 556). Word, Incorporated.

¹⁷ Köstenberger, A. J. (2021). *1-2 Timothy & Titus* (T. D. Alexander, T. R. Schreiner, & A. J. Köstenberger, Eds.; p. 263). Lexham Press.

In line with one of the main themes of the letter, Timothy has also paid careful attention to Paul's sufferings. Interestingly, rather than referencing more recent struggles, Paul reminisces concerning the earliest days of their journeys together. The cities listed are the area that Timothy grew up in, and the episodes surrounding them where things he was aware of when he first made the decision to follow Paul in Acts 16. According to Knight, "Paul mentions these earliest persecutions rather than later ones, probably because he wants to remind Timothy of his commitment to the apostle and his ministry from the very beginning and that from the very beginning that ministry has involved persecutions."¹⁸ Indeed, Timothy had made the decision to follow Paul while the apostle was in the fire of persecution.

Verse 11 concludes with a resolute statement that in all of these persecutions the Lord had rescued Paul. This is a marvelous statement, given the fact that Paul had indeed suffered greatly in these places. In Antioch, the Jews incited persecutions and drove him from the city (Acts 13:50). In Iconium, there was an attempt to stone them (Acts 14:5). Then in the aftermath of a dramatic miracle in Lystra, people from Antioch and Iconium came and stirred the people up and they followed through on stoning Paul and left him for dead (Acts 14:19). In light of these events, it's interesting to wonder what Paul means by being rescued. It obviously doesn't mean the deliverance from all harm. Perhaps Paul considered anything short of death a rescue. Obviously, rescue did not mean the absence of persecution and suffering. Rather, it meant continued ministry in spite of it all.

Verse 12 continues that theme by restating an axiom that Jesus had shared with His disciples: "'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you," (ESV John 15:20). Paul did not receive that assurance from Jesus at the same occasion as the rest of the disciples. Instead, it was a part of his call experience. When Ananias prayed for Paul, suffering was just as much a part of that call as preaching was (Acts 9:16). So, whereas some might look upon persecution as a sign to change paths, Paul is encouraging Timothy to simply view it as part of the course. As Hughes states, "Our culture flees suffering, seeing nothing noble in it or beyond it. But Christians must expect it in the regular course of serving God."¹⁹

Verses 13 and 14 discuss the divergent trajectories of the false teachers from Timothy. The two categories of people mentioned here are described as "evil" and "imposters". "Imposters" is literally the word for wizards. This seems to be a clear reference to the magicians and false teachers mentioned in vv. 8-9²⁰. Their downward trajectory is a consequence of them spreading their spiritual disease. They deceive others because they are first deceived. The distinction of verse 13 is that these people "will go on from bad to worse", whereas in verse 9 "they will not get very far". Verse 9 seems to be

¹⁸ Knight, G. W. (1992). *The Pastoral Epistles: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 440). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

¹⁹ Hughes, R. K., & Chapell, B. (2000). *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: to guard the deposit* (p. 234). Crossway Books.

²⁰ Guthrie, D. (1990). *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary* (Vol. 14, p. 180). InterVarsity Press.

talking more about their impact on others, which will be curtailed because “their folly will be plain to all”. However, v 13 seems to be describing the personal downward effect of evil. As Knight wrote, “the teaching of evil does not necessarily capture a wider audience as it becomes more intense and therefore does not become more extensive as it becomes more intensive.”²¹ Thankfully, it seems that the more wicked someone gets, the less they have influence.

Verse 14 begins with another disjunctive conjunction. When being compared to the false teachers, the evil men, and the imposters, Timothy has a spiritual trajectory that is radically different. Timothy’s current spiritual condition is a consequences of both lifelong training and personal persistence. To Timothy’s credit, he has “continued” in what he has been taught and has “firmly believed” in. But others have played a major role in this. In youth, he would have been taught by his mother and grandmother (1:5), among possible others. And later in life he was discipled by Paul, whom he is described as following in verses 10-11 in this passage. The implication here seems to be that Timothy had been commended to the Scripture by the best people he had known. As White observes, “The truths for which St. Paul is contending were commended to Timothy by the sanction of the best and noblest personalities whom he had ever known or heard of.”²² Seeing how the sacred text had shaped the lives of Paul, Eunice, and Lois served to further confirm the value of the word.

Verse 15 has a very strange term, translated “sacred writings” by the ESV. It is used only here in the NT. Both Philo and Josephus use this term to describe the Old Testament scripture, a sign that the Greek world used the term for that purpose.²³ However, this is not the typical way the Scripture is referred to in the New Testament. Mounce’s conclusion is that Paul is using this terminology to build his argument that both the OT and the teaching of the Gospel are sacred.²⁴ And furthermore, these two work in concert to make one wise to salvation. Mounce asserts that, “...Paul must add a qualifier: it is not the Hebrew Scripture alone that should instruct Timothy concerning salvation, but that Scripture understood through the faith of those who are “in Christ Jesus.”²⁵ And it is these combined writings, both OT and Gospel, that have resident power within them that is able to bring people to salvation.²⁶

When we come to the very recognizable verse 16, the initial issue of how to define “all scripture” is the most pressing of questions. It would obviously include the whole of the Old Testament. However, if in previous verses Paul was indeed building a case for the inclusion of the gospel, then it would also warrant those books eventually

²¹ Knight, G. W. (1992). *The Pastoral Epistles: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 442). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

²² N. J. D. White, *The First and Second Epistles to Timothy and the Epistle to Titus*, ed. W. R. Nicoll (New York: Doran, n.d.), 174.

²³ Towner, P. H. (2006). *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (pp. 582–594). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

²⁴ Mounce, W. D. (2000). *Pastoral Epistles* (Vol. 46, pp. 563–564). Word, Incorporated.

²⁵ Mounce, W. D. (2000). *Pastoral Epistles* (Vol. 46, pp. 564–566). Word, Incorporated.

²⁶ Knight, G. W. (1992). *The Pastoral Epistles: a commentary on the Greek text* (pp. 443–444). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

identified as the canon of the NT to be included as well (even though those all of those books may not have been identified or written as of yet). Hughes makes this point well by pointing out that Paul references Luke and calls it scripture (1 Tim 5:18, Luke 10:7). Likewise, Peter references Paul and calls it scripture (2 Peter 3:16). As well as Paul referring to his own writings as authoritative, insisting that "...his own writings be read (1 Thessalonians 5:27), exchanged and shared (Colossians 4:16), and obeyed (1 Corinthians 14:37; 2 Thessalonians 2:15), and his claim that the very words of his message were "words taught by the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:13). It is evident that he regarded his own writings as Scripture."²⁷ Indeed, Paul commends Timothy that the full canon of both testaments has God's breath as it's source.²⁸ Just as our words have been enunciated by the power of our breath, the scripture has been given voice by God's.

Since this word is breathed from God, it is therefore intrinsically valuable. The following four descriptive phrases are grouped into two pairs by both Guthrie and Knight. Marshall calls this artificial, and describes the list instead as a chiasm. interestingly, Marshall also endorses the possibility that the "... sequence in which the general term 'teaching' is followed by a sequence of three describing the steps in the conversion of sinners (cf. Preisker, H., *TDNT* V, 451).²⁹ This is an intriguing thought, given the previous verse's affirmation of the scriptures work in salvation, teaching being the overarching thought. Then reproof, correction, and training be seen as corresponding to a sinner being convicted of sin and then corrected towards and instructed in the truth. This may be imposed on the text as much as Guthrie and Knight's suggestion, but it is plausible. However, it should not be viewed as only speaking to salvation, because the word has an ongoing work in all of our lives. As for the terms themselves, once again Yarbrough does well at unpacking these terms.³⁰

Paul's description of the "man of God" could be speaking about all Christians in general, or Timothy very specifically. Knight does a good job of reconciling this by stating that, "The sense of the passage is that scripture is given to enable any "person of God" to meet the demands that God places on that person and in particular to equip Timothy the Christian leader for the particular demands made on him (cf. 4:2)."³¹ Thus, it is being applied very specifically here to Timothy and His role as a Pastor, but that doesn't preclude the Scriptures usefulness to every believer in their God-given roles. And though it doesn't translate well, Paul uses two words for "equip" to emphasize the power of the word. The meaning, according to Hughes, is that: "The

²⁷ Hughes, R. K., & Chapell, B. (2000). *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: to guard the deposit* (p. 238). Crossway Books.

²⁸ Knight, G. W. (1992). *The Pastoral Epistles: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 447). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

²⁹ Marshall, I. H., & Towner, P. H. (2004). *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (p. 795). T&T Clark International.

³⁰ Knight, G. W. (1992). *The Pastoral Epistles: a commentary on the Greek text* (pp. 445–446). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

³¹ Knight, G. W. (1992). *The Pastoral Epistles: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 450). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

man of God is super-equipped by the Word of God.”³²

These verses offer a number of excellent preaching opportunities. The focal point, however, seems to be the fact that Timothy’s upward trajectory has had some assistance. Without question, the scripture has assisted him, and provided him all the instruction that he needs. However, that instruction did not come solely from Timothy sitting alone with the scrolls. He was taught. He had the scripture modeled for him. Paul modeled it by both in His ministry and life. His mother and grandmother modeled the scripture through their sincerity of faith. There is even the allusion to “many witnesses” in 2:2, that Timothy has heard this truth along side. As a whole, Timothy has not grown in the faith by himself. He has been aided by the faithful around him. This is, no doubt, set up as a model for how every believer should grown in the faith. As Timothy is instructed to do the same thing with “faithful men” in 2:2. This generational approach to disciple making is vital to the advance of the Gospel.

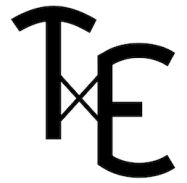
In addition, this passage seems well suited to address other topics as well:

- The value of following the right people, and the difference in trajectory it makes. Thus the juxtaposition of Timothy with those described in v13.
- The value of expecting suffering. Which would mean we aren't surprised by it, or misinterpret it as our being outside the will of God.
- Tracing Paul’s example, we see that the life of a minister is more than service but also a life well lived. Both are needed and should be available for others to follow.
- The power of the word to both lead to salvation and then progress us in maturity. Emphasizing how both the OT and the NT are valuable for our ongoing growth.

³² Hughes, R. K., & Chapell, B. (2000). *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: to guard the deposit* (p. 239). Crossway Books.



Theological Roundtable 2 0 2 3



Sam Storms
Enjoying God Ministries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

2 TIMOTHY 4

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry (2 Tim. 4:1-5)

The connection between this paragraph and what immediately precedes in 2 Timothy 3:16–17 is obscured by the chapter division in our English Bibles. The “Scriptures” (“sacred writings”) just mentioned are not to be hidden away or used merely as an object of study but must be proclaimed or heralded (Gk., *kērussō*, “preach,” in v. 2) regardless of the time or circumstances. The words “in season and out of season” are not a justification for insensitivity to our audience, as if we give no consideration to *their* circumstances. They apply to the herald of God’s word. We must always be prepared to proclaim the truth, without regard to *our* circumstances.

Some distinguish between this heralding of the “gospel” and the teaching of sound doctrine. But given the repeated emphasis in 2 Timothy on the “sound words” (1:13), the “good deposit” (1:14), “the word of truth” (2:15, 18), and the “knowledge of the truth” (2:25; 3:7), which Paul calls on Timothy to guard and faithfully teach, the “word” in 4:2 must be inclusive of everything Timothy “heard” from Paul (1:13; 2:2). This is reinforced in v. 2 where Paul describes this preaching of the word as “teaching” and again in v. 3 where the preaching of the word is a countermeasure to the abandonment of “sound teaching.”

The urgency of Paul’s exhortation is reinforced both by his use of the verb best translated, “solemnly urge” in v. 1, as well as his appeal to “the presence of God and of Christ Jesus.” It is not only Paul’s charge to Timothy but the latter’s exercise of his ministry that are done conscious of the fact that all is undertaken beneath the gaze of God and Christ. If that were not enough, Paul reminds Timothy that Jesus, whose “appearing” (i.e., second coming) and “kingdom” are impending, will “judge” all

mankind. People often don't like to think of Jesus Christ as the judge of all mankind. Yet here Paul says that he will judge the living and the dead. How might this truth about a future judgment affect the way we live in the present? Is it appropriate when sharing the gospel with an unbeliever to tell them of impending judgment? If not, why not?

The importance of patient, faithful instruction ("reprove" or awaken their conscience to sin; "rebuke" or reprimand; and "exhort" or call to repentance, v. 2) is due to the emergence of a "time" when people "will not endure sound teaching" ("for," with which v. 3 opens, grounds the exhortation in the perilous times that lay ahead). They will chafe when the truth is made known, preferring instead something new, different, and sensational that caters to their sinful passions. They will hanker after whatever doctrines tickle their fancy. Sadly, people won't want to be edified, but only entertained. They will not listen to the truth but will decide for themselves what they want to hear and then search out teachers who will oblige. They will consider "the truth" and pattern of "sound words" unappealing and will turn to embrace baseless "myths" (v. 4) and other philosophical speculations.

Timothy's response to these developments is (1) to remain sober-minded or stable in times of instability (the present tense likely suggests perseverance); (2) to endure suffering (a repetition of what Paul has said before in 1:8; 2:3, 24; 3:10-11, 12); (3) to do the work of an evangelist (either Timothy had this spiritual gift or Paul expects every minister to be actively sharing the gospel); and (4) to fulfill his ministry, even when others choose to abandon their calling.

Does Paul's exhortation, "do the work of an evangelist," suggest that Timothy has received this spiritual gift (Eph. 4:11)? Or is this a responsibility that all Christians have even if they have not been so gifted?

There are some who argue that the reality of Christ's promised return is of little practical benefit. A focus on the Parousia will serve only to fuel speculation as to when it will happen and take our eyes off the pressing concerns of life and its challenges in the here and now. Paul would take great exception to this idea. His appeal to Timothy (and to us all) to remain faithful in the proclamation and instruction of the truth of God's word is rooted in the inescapable "appearing" of Jesus at the end of history.

This is consistent with what Paul and other New Testament authors say elsewhere. The sufferings we endure now are not worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed to us when Christ returns (Rom. 8:18). The reason we must "cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light" (Rom.13:12) is that the day of Christ's appearing is "nearer to us now than when we first believed" (Rom. 13:11). The strength to press on toward the goal of our calling is found in our expectant waiting for the return of Christ from heaven (Phil. 3:14, 20). Numerous other texts, in addition to this one in 2 Timothy 4, remind us of the practical, sanctifying influence of our hope in the

return of Jesus Christ (see Col. 3:1–4; 1 Thess. 1:9–10; 4:13–18; 5:9–11; 2 Thess. 1:9–12; Titus 2:11–14; etc.).

This text, though instructive to all Christians, is especially suited to those who preach and teach the whole counsel of God. This being the case, we must never lose sight of the fact that the stress is on the word “preach” or “proclaim” and “teaching” (vv. 2–3), together with the fact that people will cease “listening” to the truth (v. 4). The point is that it is not our responsibility merely to hear the word, nor even to stop after believing and obeying it, as if that would fulfill our ministry obligations. There is more to gospel ministry than simply guarding the good deposit from the deviation of false teachers. And yes, Paul is calling on Timothy to do more than “suffer” for the pattern of sound words entrusted to him. The urgent exhortation is to preach it to others! God has entrusted this treasure to us so that we might communicate it with patience and clarity to a lost and dying world. Followers of Jesus must hear the “sound teaching” that is found in the “sacred writings” of holy Scripture. Notwithstanding the immature demands of many to have their ears tickled, Scripture is for “teaching” and “training in righteousness” so that God’s people might grow up in the fullness of Christ Jesus.

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing (2 Tim. 4:6–8)

Paul has a clear reason for his exhortation to young Timothy to be faithful in the proclamation and explanation of the truth of God’s word. It is because (“for”; v. 6) he knows his time for this sort of ministry is coming to a close. In order to make his point, he employs two metaphors to describe his impending death.

First, he portrays his imminent death as if his life were a “drink offering” about to be poured out. Paul may well have in mind Numbers 15, which describes a drink offering of wine being poured out beside the altar whenever a lamb or other such animal was sacrificed. It is a vivid image of the gradual ebbing away of Paul’s earthly life. The second metaphor is seen in his use of the word “departure” to describe his death. The word literally means “loosing” and was often used of both a soldier striking his tent after a brief bivouac and the “loosing” of a boat from its moorings. The latter idea is most likely in his mind here, as Paul envisions his death as the weighing of an anchor and the gentle drift of a boat to sea. He uses the same Greek verb in Philippians 1:23 to again speak of his departure from this life into the presence of Christ (“my desire is to depart and be with Christ”). It is as if the desire to be in the immediate presence of his Lord pulls on Paul’s heart like the waves and gentle breeze tug on the boat, seeking to detach it from the hold of the dock.

In three terse statements, Paul then sums up his life and ministry. It's important to note his use of the perfect tense in all three declarations. The perfect tense in Greek often speaks of a completed action in the past that has ongoing implications or results. Thus, Paul describes his life as a good (i.e., godly, Christ-exalting) fight that he has fought, a race that he has successfully run and won, and a faith that he has kept not only in the past but up through the present day.

All that awaits him in the future is the crown of righteousness that Jesus, the righteous judge, will award him on the final day (see Gal. 5:5). Is this "righteousness" a life of holiness that Paul lived by the power of God's grace, or is it the "righteousness" of Christ himself imputed to him by faith? If the latter, we should translate this, "the crown which is righteousness" (genitive of apposition). There may well be a contrast here between the sentence of condemnation from unrighteous Nero, and the glorious reversal when the righteous judge Jesus crowns his life and ministry.

The good news, of course, is that this is not a hope reserved solely for Paul or other apostles, but is the confident expectation of all who "have loved" (once again, note his use of the perfect tense) the mere thought of Christ's return and our seeing him face to face (cf. 1 John 3:1-3).

The "appearing" or personal, physical return of Christ Jesus to consummate his kingdom, what Paul here in v. 8 and again will in Titus 2:13 refer to as his *epiphany*, is certainly the source of the apostle's resolve to fight, finish the course, and keep the faith. When we ask how a man such as Paul could endure the suffering that regularly came his way, the slander to which he was constantly exposed, and the opposition that daily threatened to undermine his work, the answer forthcoming is his sincere and confident hope that Christ would return and reward the Spirit-empowered faithfulness of his servants.

But merely looking for or living with the moment-by-moment expectation of the second coming is not enough. Paul explicitly speaks of having "loved" his appearing. The love for the return of Christ is not so much a desire to be set free from hardship and physical pain as it is a deep and abiding affection for the person of Christ himself. Paul longs to see Jesus! His hope is fixed on being with his Lord and Savior, and it is this confident expectation that serves to sanctify Paul in the midst of his affliction while he remains yet alive on earth (see 1 John 3:1-3).

This is a good time in our study of 2 Timothy to pause and ask ourselves, Do we love the appearing of Christ Jesus? Are our hearts riveted on his return? And if the answer is yes, the question must still be asked, Why? What is it that we long for and love to see? Is it merely the promise that our bodies will be redeemed and glorified (Phil. 3:20-21)? Do we love the appearing of Christ because then our enemies will be judged for their wickedness and their oppression of the church? Is our hope for life in the new heaven and new earth the driving force in this "love"?

All these things are entirely legitimate and will, in point of fact, come to pass when Jesus appears in the clouds of heaven. But they pale in significance when compared to the prospect of actually seeing the splendor and beauty and majesty of Jesus himself. It is Christ first, and Christ finally, whom Paul loves to behold, whose glorious, transforming visage will make every sacrifice and all suffering more than worthwhile. Is this why you love the appearing of Jesus?

Each time I read or hear of another pastor who has “burned out” and left pastoral ministry, I wonder if it is due, at least in part, to having lost sight of the impending sight of Jesus. I’m not minimizing the burden of local church ministry. I would never suggest that pastoral work is easy. Carrying the burdens of countless broken sinners and the devastation they experience, together with the daily pressure of leading a staff and preparing sermons and hospital visitation and crisis counseling, on top of which is the constant criticism that most pastors face from those whom they selflessly serve, all combine to lay waste to one’s energy and the resolve to press through until we are rewarded with the sight of Jesus.

Perhaps a daily diet of meditation on the impending return of Jesus, or at least the expectation that with death we will be ushered into his immediate presence, can serve to energize weary pastoral souls and worn out bodies to fight the good fight until the end and finish, rather than drop out of the race, and keep the faith rather than compromise it under the pressure of people who simply want their ears tickled.

Given Paul’s relentless resolve not to quit and the numerous ways he strengthened himself to persevere (see 2 Cor. 4:16-18), how have you remained true to your calling? What has kept you in the race? What are the greatest temptations you face to simply throw in the towel and walk a different path? Perhaps someone you thought would never let you down, betrayed you and left you in the lurch when you needed them most. Paul was not immune to such relational pain, as we will clearly see in the next paragraph.

Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message (2 Tim. 4:9-13).

The primary thrust of these verses is Paul’s urgent appeal for Timothy to come to Rome, together with the reasons why. Although Paul’s primary desire was for the appearing of Christ (v. 8), he was exceedingly desperate for Timothy’s arrival in Rome.

Here is why.

First, Demas had “deserted” Paul (the same Greek verb is used again in v. 16). This would have been especially painful to the apostle, as Demas at one time was one of his closer friends and co-workers (see Col. 4:14 and Philem. 24). The reason may have been due to the oppressive conditions of Paul’s second Roman imprisonment as over against the relatively comfortable incarceration of his first. Perhaps Demas did not reckon with the demands that gospel ministry entailed. One thing is clear: Demas cared more for the comforts and ease the world offered him than he did for suffering for Christ’s sake (cf. Prov. 25:19). Was Demas a Christian who abandoned the faith? If so, we don’t know if he ever repented. Or was he a false believer whose abandonment of Paul disclosed the true condition of his heart? We may never know, at least not in this life.

Paul’s desire for Timothy’s presence was intensified by the departures of Crescens (v. 10), Titus (v. 10), and Tychicus (v. 12). There is no word of condemnation here, so we should assume they left or were sent by Paul on legitimate missionary outreach. At least Luke remained at Paul’s side (v. 11). The request that Timothy bring Mark with him is highly instructive (v. 11). During Paul’s second missionary journey, Mark had recoiled in fear, incurring Paul’s anger and mistrust (Acts 13:3; 15:36–41). It may have been through the encouragement from Barnabas or the spiritual influence of Peter (1 Pet. 5:13), or perhaps even the disciplinary action of Paul that accounts for Mark’s restoration. It is a testimony to the grace of God that a man who had abandoned Paul out of fear is now regarded by the apostle as “very useful” to him “for ministry” (v. 11).

Verse 13 bears witness to the humanity of Scripture and Paul’s authorship of this letter. The simple realism and down-to-earth request of this verse weighs heavily against any suggestion that a later imitator wrote the letter under Paul’s name. Would a pseudonymous author have bothered to include such mundane details as these?

Let’s jump forward a bit to Paul’s closing comments in vv. 19–21 where we see much the same thing. Many Christians struggle to understand that Scripture is both the product of the creative breath of God (2 Tim. 3:16–17) and the perspective, personality, and lifestyle circumstances of the human author. The latter is often ignored, but these statements remind us that NT documents didn’t simply descend from heaven in a cloud of revelation, unrelated to the circumstances of men like Paul, Peter, and Luke, but were the infallible result of the Spirit guiding the thoughts of human authors, each in his own unique historical and social situation.

How else do we account for such seemingly unimportant details as the fact that “Erastus remained at Corinth” and that “Eubulus sends greetings” to Timothy? No one’s life today is radically affected by these truths that were uniquely tied to the lives of first-century figures. So, why did the Spirit influence Paul to include such mundane details in holy Scripture?

It may well be that such information serves as a reminder to us of the human element in Scripture. Paul didn't write his letters while in the third heaven, cut off from the countless details of human interaction and relationships on earth. If nothing else, then, such information as we find in vv. 13, 19-22 points to the miracle of divine inspiration, or what theologians refer to as *concurrence*, in which the Spirit infallibly guides the distinct personalities, idiosyncrasies, and life-situations of each biblical author without violating their volitional input in order to record precisely what he knows will best serve the church throughout the course of history.

Paul issues one final warning to Timothy in vv. 14-15. The "great harm" inflicted on Paul may only be his opposition to Paul's gospel (v. 15b), but some believe Alexander was responsible for Paul's arrest and imprisonment, perhaps even serving as a witness for the prosecution. In any case, he is to be studiously avoided! "The Lord will repay him" may be optative, hence, "May the Lord repay him." If so, this would be a wish or prayer by Paul. But it is more likely that this is a simple future tense forecast of what awaits Alexander. Paul is not vindictive, but he is assured that God will be just in his dealing with this traitor.

The role of the Lord (most likely a reference to Christ) as righteous judge is one that we should not overlook. We are reminded of this in John 5, where Jesus himself declares that "the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father" (John 5:22). Again, Jesus repeats this point and says that the Father "has given him [Jesus] authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man" (John 5:27). Peter confirmed this in his message to Cornelius: "And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he [Jesus] is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10:42; see Acts 17:31).

In fact, even Christians will "appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" (2 Cor. 5:10). This is yet another witness to the fact that Christ is fully God, for judgment is a decidedly and uniquely *divine* prerogative everywhere in Scripture.

We can learn much from the experience of Paul with both Demas and Mark. Demas at first gave every appearance of being a faithful, reliable, and devoted co-worker with the apostle. But under the pressure of persecution, his true nature was disclosed. Mark, on the other hand, gave every appearance of being an unreliable, immature, and selfish pretender who was more concerned with his own safety than that of Paul's. But through the encouragement of Barnabas and the fatherly oversight of Peter, Mark demonstrated that he was truly born again and worthy of the trust that Paul would invest in him.

It may be helpful for us all to ask whether or not we've had interaction and close relationship with a "Demas" or a "Mark". If the former, how did you respond to their betrayal and departure? If the latter, did you permanently dismiss them as of no benefit to you or your ministry?

It is also significant that Paul doesn't stop with affirming the sincerity of Mark's repentance or with his endorsement of Mark's return to ministry. Paul declares in no uncertain terms: "I need him! He is of great benefit to me in my ministry." The examples of Demas and Mark are a healthy reminder to us all to be slow to judge. We must be both patient and discerning.

One final observation concerns Paul's request that Timothy bring "the books, and above all the parchments" (v. 13). Late in life, approaching death, Paul was ever the student of God's Word! And so must we be. In a sermon he preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle on 2 Timothy 4:13, Charles Spurgeon reminds us of this important but often overlooked fact:

"Paul is inspired, yet he wants books; he has been preaching nearly thirty years, yet he wants books; he has a wider experience than most people, yet he wants books; he has been caught up into heaven and heard things which it is unlawful to utter, yet he wants books; he has written the major part of the New Testament, yet he wants books" ("Paul—His Cloak and His Books", Sermon no. 542; November 29, 1863).

At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen (2 Tim. 4:16-18).

The "first defense" to which Paul makes reference was likely not the trial proper, but something along the lines of a preliminary hearing. That it was his "first" appearance suggests that there were more to follow. Thus, it may well be that Paul was so persuasive at this "first" hearing that an immediate verdict of guilty was delayed. We aren't told what precise charge was brought against Paul. It may have been sedition against the state. We do know that early Christians were accused of cannibalism (for eating the "blood and body" of Christ in the Eucharist) and incest (for expressing love for one another as "brothers" and "sisters" in the Lord).

It is difficult not to hear in Paul's words a deep sense of disappointment in having been abandoned by those whom he anticipated would be at his side. We don't know who these individuals were, but certainly it would not include those listed in vv. 10b-13. They were probably sent by Paul as messengers or missionaries and no negative word is connected to their absence in Rome. Those who "deserted" the apostle may well have fallen victim to fear, self-concern, or some weakness of character that prompted their decision.

What is of special significance is that Paul prays (this is the force of the optative, *logistheiē*, from *logizomai*) that “it not be charged against them” (v. 16b; see Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60). This differs massively from his response to Alexander the coppersmith (v. 14). Alexander had spoken out of deliberate malice and opposition to Paul’s “message.” These others, it would seem, failed Paul out of fear and self-preservation but did not deny the gospel itself. To them, he extends mercy and, in effect, asks God to forgive them.

One often hears today of people who have chosen to “deconstruct” from Christianity because of wounds or abuse or abandonment they incurred at the hands of the local church (what some refer to as “church hurt”). When we examine the life and ministry of Paul, we see a man who suffered more from the sinful behavior of the church than perhaps any other. His relationship with the church at Corinth is a case in point. And yet, notwithstanding the departure of those who had professed loyalty to him, notwithstanding the relational pain he suffered from mistreatment and misunderstanding on the part of other Christians, Paul stood firm in his faith. But this was not due to his own personal resolve, but because the Lord stood by him and “strengthened” him (v. 17). One thinks of the “help” or provision “of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:19) that sustained him during his first Roman imprisonment.

The “lion’s mouth” from which Paul was rescued would not be literal lions in the Roman amphitheater. As a Roman citizen, Paul would never have been subjected to that fate. Some think either Satan (1 Pet. 5:8) or the Emperor Nero is in view. More likely “the lion’s mouth” was proverbial for any and all extreme dangers (cf. Ps. 7:2; 22:21; 35:17). In this particular case, it probably refers to the judges who failed to reach a decision at his initial hearing, thus sparing him from immediate execution. The many evil deeds from which he will in the future be rescued is not his assurance of escaping physical death, as the alternative to it is entrance into the “heavenly kingdom” of Christ. No human verdict of guilty, no suffering in prison, no beheading will undermine the certainty of his eternal destiny.

Such a rock-solid promise to lay hold of in the midst of intense hardship warrants a concluding doxology of praise: “to him be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

The promise from Christ Jesus that he will never leave nor forsake his people is the central truth to which Paul clings in his final days of earthly life and ministry (Heb. 13:5). As painful as it may be to have one’s companions leave you in the lurch when you most need them, the believer can always count on the sustaining presence of Jesus.

Some are inclined to ask, “But if Jesus really loved and cared for Paul, why would he have allowed these ministry partners to abandon him in the first place? Why didn’t he spare his beloved apostle the pain and anguish of watching his ‘friends’ walk away?” Perhaps it was precisely in order to compel Paul to rely on Jesus all the more. Perhaps Paul was left with only Jesus to deepen his love and appreciation for all that Jesus

would do for him, things that no mere human companion could achieve. Perhaps Jesus orchestrated it this way so that Paul would be forced to depend entirely on the “strength” Jesus supplied, ensuring that the Lord would receive all the glory for Paul’s endurance. This truth is echoed in Paul’s words to the Corinthians:

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Cor. 4:7).

Paul never presumed that Jesus would deliver him from prison or ultimately from execution. But he knew that no manner or degree of persecution could separate him from the love of God in Christ (Rom. 8:35–38). This reflects directly on the character and consistency of our Lord. Simply put, he can be trusted. And the Father has also promised that since he has done the greater thing for us in the gift of his Son and the eternal life we have by faith in him, he will surely graciously give us all lesser things that we need to remain faithful to him in the midst of trial (see Rom. 8:31–32).

We should also note that Paul takes no personal credit for standing firmly in the face of such relentless opposition. When it comes to identifying the source of his strength, he gives all praise and gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We hear much these days of people who have experienced abuse or some form of trauma at the hands of dysfunctional churches and misguided leaders. The pain that Christians suffer at the hands of other Christians can be especially intense and difficult to heal. To be mistreated by unbelievers is to be expected. But when those who are in leadership exploit their position of power and authority to do harm to the sheep, it is extraordinarily devastating, a heartbreaking betrayal from which many never recover.

Yet, if there was anyone who suffered at the hands of other Christians, it was Paul! These who “deserted” him and left him standing alone weren’t pagans. They were his fellow-workers in gospel ministry, longtime friends and traveling companions. Yet we see no bitterness in the man, no desire for revenge, no loss of love for them or for Christ. As much as it appears that Paul would have been justified in writing off the body of Christ as fickle and unfaithful, concerned solely with their own safety and personal welfare, he says it with unmistakable charity: “May it not be charged against them!” (v. 16b). Would that we all might learn from this example.

Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus. Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers. The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you (2 Tim. 4:19-22).

Of the nine individuals mentioned in his final greetings, three in particular are deserving of comment.

Prisca (also known as Priscilla) and her husband, Aquila, are often mentioned in the NT. Although Paul doesn't say anything about it here, we know from elsewhere in the NT that she and her husband moved often. They willingly understood the challenges that came with constant travel. They first lived together in Rome until they were driven out of the city by the Emperor Claudius in 49 a.d., together with all the Jews who resided there. In other words, they were not strangers to persecution. We read about this in Acts 18:1-2,

"After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome" (Acts 18:1-2).

They then traveled to Ephesus where they hosted a church in their house (Acts 18:26; 1 Cor. 16:19). They evidently returned to live in Rome and once again hosted a church in their home (see Rom. 16:5a). We then read here in 2 Timothy 4:19 that they finally settled once again in Ephesus. So, this couple lived in Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, back in Rome, then back again in Ephesus. And everywhere they went they opened their home for the church (see Rom. 16:5a)! That's quite an example for us to follow!

Evidently Prisca was quite well educated in the Scriptures and could articulate and teach biblical truth to others. We see this in Acts 18,

"Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:24-26).

Apollos was eloquent, competent, highly instructed, accurate in his teaching, and yet both Priscilla and Aquila were more skilled and more knowledgeable! As accurate as Apollos was in teaching the things concerning Jesus, both Priscilla and Aquila were more accurate! Gentlemen: take heed and follow their example. If any of you men, specifically husbands, are intimidated by the fact that your wives know the Bible better than you do and can explain it to others more accurately than you do, get over it! Better still, start studying and become a good Bible expositor.

Prisca, along with her husband, was a “fellow worker” alongside Paul (Rom. 16:3). More than that, they were “fellow workers in Christ Jesus” (16:3) which is to say that she and Aquila expended their labors on behalf of the gospel and for the glory of Jesus. All their travels and all their labors and every sacrifice they made was for Jesus!

Finally, Prisca and Aquila were risk takers. They “risked their necks for my life,” says Paul (Rom. 16:3b). Prisca laid it all on the line for the gospel and to protect Paul and his ministry. We don’t know precisely how, but Paul considered it significant and appeals for all to express their profound gratitude to this lady and her husband. I’m alive today, says Paul, because of this woman and her husband.

The third person of note here is Trophimus (v. 20). The Jews thought that Paul had defiled the temple by bringing, Trophimus, a Gentile, into its holy precincts (Acts 21:29). We read here that not only was he “ill,” but that Paul left him in this condition at Miletus. Contrary to what some have concluded, this does not mean healing gifts had been withdrawn from the church. Gifts of healings (1 Cor. 12:9, 28) were never in the possession of a person to exercise when he/she might will. They were (and are) subject to God’s sovereign good pleasure and timing. That Paul was still operating in this gifting toward the close of his ministry is evident from what happened on the island of Malta (see Acts 28:1–10).

Paul’s change in prepositions from his opening salutation to this concluding greeting is of note. In 2 Timothy 1:2 he prays that “grace, mercy, and peace” would come *to* Timothy from God the Father and Christ Jesus (as reflected in Paul’s use of the dative case). But here he prays that God’s grace would go *with* Timothy. Grace, being the power of the Spirit’s presence in and through us, first comes “to” us, to encourage and sustain us, and then, as we close this letter and extend ourselves in ministry, goes “with” us to continue to strengthen and uphold us in the challenges we face each day. This is a consistent pattern in Paul’s letters (see Rom. 1:7 and 16:20; 1 Cor. 1:3 and 16:23; 2 Cor. 1:2 and 13:14; Gal. 1:2 and 6:18; Eph. 1:2 and 6:24; Phil. 1:2 and 4:23; Col. 1:2 and 4:18; 1 Thess. 1:1 and 5:28; 2 Thess. 1:2 and 3:18; 1 Tim. 1:2 and 6:21; Titus 1:4 and 3:15; Philem. 3 and 25).

The “Lord” whom Paul assures Timothy will be “with” his “spirit” is likely the Lord Jesus Christ. But what precisely does it mean that Christ will be “with” our “spirit”? We know that when Jesus ascended into heaven he assured his followers that he would not leave them as orphans: “Another Helper,” the Holy Spirit, whom he describes as “the Spirit of truth” (John 14:16) will be sent to be with us forever. When Jesus promised the disciples in the upper room that he would not leave them as orphans but “will come” to them (John 14:18), he probably had in mind the impending pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost and the latter’s permanent indwelling presence in and among the people of God.

In saying that he would be “with” our “spirit” (2 Tim. 4:22; see also Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23;

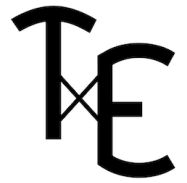
Philem. 25), we should not take that to mean the grace of the Spirit does not dwell in our bodies. By “spirit” Paul likely has in view the totality of our spiritual, emotional, and physical constitution. Should we ever grow weary, be it in our spirit, mind, soul, will, or body, we have the assurance that God’s “grace” will always be “with” us.

Christians are often heard complaining that they feel all alone, perhaps even abandoned by the Lord in their time of greatest need. Nothing could be farther from the truth. We may not always feel or sense the Lord’s sustaining presence, but we must discipline our hearts to remain confident in believing that he is ever with us.

It is typically during times of severe physical suffering and pain that we allow ourselves to doubt whether God cares, whether God is even aware of our condition, whether God is still present with us to enable us to not lose hope. He is. The “grace” that comes “to” us when we immerse ourselves in his written Word also abides “with” us when we return to the normal tasks and challenges of daily life. It seems clear that Paul envisions the inspired text of holy Scripture to be a means by which this empowering grace enters our lives and sustains our spirits. Thus, to live in ignorance of the revelation in his Word is to cut ourselves off from the gracious means through which God intends to teach, reprove, correct, and train us (2 Tim. 3:16).



Theological Roundtable 2023



Alan Wright
Reynolda Presbyterian Church, Winston-Salem, North Carolina

TEXT TO TABLE

INTRODUCTION

John Piper has said, “Preaching. . . is a unique kind of communication. It is something not brought from the world into the service of the church. Nor can the world take it from the church and use it for its own purposes. It is different, radically different, from anything in the world,” (*Expository Exultation*, Crossway, 2018, p. 351).

If preaching is unlike any other form of communication, we can expect that its preparation and declaration is unlike any other kind of preparation and declaration. Preaching emerges from revelation. It is God-originated. But how do we open ourselves to His promptings? How do we move from the passage to the preaching, from the text to the table where we serve God’s supernatural food?

THE PREACHER AS CO-CREATOR

Preaching is a creative process. There is a blank screen. There is a text. All that follows flows from creativity. But unlike God, we do not create *ex nihilo*; we are given our materials—our palette, our paints, our subject. It is said of Michelangelo that he saw his sculptures in the stone yearning to come forth. Likewise, preaching is a creative, imaginative process that arises from the text before us.

EXPOSITION

So, our creative process begins with God’s own Word. We are exposing the beauty and power and wisdom of His Word. Simply put, the goal of exposition is, as John Piper has said, “to show them what’s really there,” (Piper, p. 194). Expository preaching may take many forms, but must begin with the text.

Teacher of preachers, Haddon Robinson, defines expository preaching as “... the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.” (*Biblical Preaching* (p. 16). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.) Sometimes exposition is mistakenly equated with a line-by-line style of preaching. But expository preaching can be effective in different forms, styles and structures.

John Stott has explained:

[I]f by an “expository” sermon is meant a verse-by-verse explanation of a lengthy passage of Scripture, then indeed it is only one possible way of preaching, but this would be a misuse of the word. Properly speaking, “exposition” has a much broader meaning. It refers to the content of the sermon (biblical truth) rather than its style (a running commentary). To expound Scripture is to bring out of the text what is there and expose it to view. The expositor pries open what appears to be closed, makes plain what is obscure, unravels what is knotted and unfolds what is tightly packed. The opposite of exposition is “imposition,” which is to impose on the text what is not there. But the “text” in question could be a verse, or a sentence, or even a single word. It could equally be a paragraph, or a chapter, or a whole book (as quoted in Piper, Expository Exultation, p. 52).

Exposition, then, requires us to let the text speak. But we come to the text with one, unbending assumption –we expect it to show us the Gospel. Some years ago, I stumbled into a simple practice that frames my preaching. I begin every message with a question: “Are you ready for some good news?” And I conclude every message with a declaration: “And that’s the Gospel!” The first question requires me to remember the meaning of preaching (“*euangelizo*” = “proclaim good news”; e.g. Luke 4:18, Acts 5:42) and not deliver some other form of communication. The second question assures that I have announced the fullness of the kerygma (e.g. Rom. 16:25, 2 Timothy 4:16), rather than moral principles or good advice or mere motivational concepts.

Also, every week, I remember the three questions my homiletics professor required us to answer at the top of every submitted sermon:

- What is your main point?
- What is the good news?
- What do you want the listener to do?

When I think of the purpose of biblical exposition, I think of those questions this way:

- What part of the real meaning of this text is the focus of this sermon?
- How does this text lead us to at least one beautiful facet of the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ?
- How does the main point and good news of the text empower the listener toward authentic change?

FIRST, FEAST ON THE TEXT

To begin the creative process with a text is to allow our souls to be fascinated, or bothered, or puzzled without impatiently racing to any finish line. To begin with the text is to be honest with ourselves about the dangers of imposing an interpretation onto the text and honest about our preconceptions, about what we might wish the text says or what we'd like to force into the message. To begin with the text means to give time and space to enjoy the Word, to taste the Word, to ingest it. Our best preaching is born from our own delight. What has most nourished us is what we're likely to serve to others.

I like to plan sermon series, selecting texts in advance, jotting down seed thoughts. My current, year-long preaching series on Romans is atypical for me (most of my series are 8-14 weeks). In preparing for the Roman series, I read through Romans often enough and slowly enough to let myself feel drawn to treasures in the texts that became possible sermon seeds. I paid attention to how translations and scholars divided the texts. I put my preliminary text segments into a spreadsheet and wrote a seed thought or asked a question about the text. I also included a prospective title for the message. Though I have, at various times, published a preview of a sermon series, I now only publish it for our staff. Fifty percent of the original seed thoughts were changed once I really studied the text and almost all the sermon titles changed.

Even for thematic preaching, I try to assign myself the text ahead of time. For example, if I'm preaching a series on the power of blessing, I assign myself key texts which depict the act of blessing or exhort us to bless. Once assigned to myself, the texts for a thematic series are not proof texts for the theme, they are raw texts ready to be studied, treasured and explicated.

TREASURING THE TEXT

Exposition means that we do not imaginatively impose meaning upon the text. Instead, we creatively expose its meaning with confidence that what we see matters. We are active participants with God in the making of a miracle.

Like prayer, in which, though God's sovereign purposes prevail, our deep heart desires really matter to God, our heart thrilling, soul-convicting encounters with the text matter in the exposition of the Word. Thus, preaching is a co-participatory, co-creative process wherein God illumines and enamors the preacher's heart with revelation that then becomes the preacher's own treasure presented as gleaming from his own heart, shimmering before the congregation.

I try to read the text as if I've never read it before. Sometimes, I must read the text again and again before I can see the text rather than my preconceptions about the passage. I must pretend as though I don't know the text if I am to make discoveries.

Reading a text this way, as if for the first time, allows me to experience it, to open my heart to it, before understanding the passage or assuming an interpretation. This early reading of the text is where I ask questions of the text:

- what puzzles me?
- what surprises me?
- what inspires me?
- what captures me?
- what convicts me?
- what words or themes leap out?
- what bothers me?
- what enthralls me?

STUDY

Some preachers have been trained in Hebrew and Greek and have the skills to translate a text, looking deeply into every word and phrase. When possible, this personal attempt at translation is the most wonderful way to begin exegesis of a text. Other preachers have a working knowledge of language tools and can seek to understand nuances of the original text. But regardless of skill or training, it is imperative to understand the text.

It is important to understand the interpretive options for a text. This is where commentaries help. One of my early teachers said of commentaries, “they are your friends, your dialogue partners.” I like to think of commentaries that way. It would better to be sitting in the room with Sam Storms, asking him my questions of the text but he’s not usually in the room! Of course, excellent commentaries are more than friends; they are educators, clarifiers, insight-sharers, and thought-provokers.

After spending unhurried time treasuring the text, then studying the language of the text and reading scholarly commentaries about the text, I sometimes continue my study by reading or listening to sermons on the text. I love to watch or listen to sermons that mentors and kindred spirits have preached on the text. I almost always want to see if Spurgeon preached the text. And, sometimes, I like to read uninspiring or moralistic sermons on the text so I know what to avoid! Remember, if you take unique insights, ideas or structures from another person’s sermon, acknowledge that you have. Our listeners don’t care if we draw from other great sources, but they do care if we deceive them into thinking it was original to us.

THE PREACHER AS STORY TELLER

WHERE DOES THIS TEXT FIT IN THE BIG STORY?

Eugene Peterson has said, “Sometimes we are told that the Bible is a library made up of many kinds of writing: poems and hymns, sermons and letters, visions and dreams, genealogical lists and historical chronicles, moral teaching and admonition and proverbs. And, of course, story. But that is not so. It is all story,” (*Eat this Book*, 13).

Understanding context certainly requires investigating the historical and cultural landscape underneath the text and the likely intent of the text for the original readers, but that is only a beginning. Discerning context is a process of discovering a text’s place in the metanarrative of scripture. It is only with the big story in mind that we can discover good news on every page.

When we know the text’s place in God’s big story, we can discover how it points us to the hero of the story.

HOW DOES THE TEXT REVEAL THE TRUE HERO?

When Jesus met the depressed Emmaus Road disciples and revealed Himself as the subject of all the scriptures, He unveiled the ultimate purpose of scripture and showed Himself as the hero (Luke 24).

An old birthday card from my wife still sits on my desk with a delightful reminder of her affection: “You are my ‘once upon a time’ and my ‘happily ever after.’” I love the card not only because it reminds me of her love, but also because it reminds me of why I love Jesus and His Word so much. He’s the “Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end” (Revelation 22:13, ESV). He’s the “founder and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2, ESV). He’s the beginning of the story and the end of the story and the reason for the drama that lies between.

There’s not a text that isn’t part of the big story of one hero, Christ, redeeming sinners. If the text is a Gospel story, it’s clear — there is Jesus. But, no matter the genre or tone of text, we must discover how it fits into the glorious gospel story and how it moves us to Jesus, the hero. We must ask:

- if the text is about the guilt of sin, how does it point to the need for the Savior?
- if the text is about the problem of sin, how does it point to the power of grace?
- if the text is about the law, how does it point to the only One who kept the law?
- if the text is about Old Covenant, how does it point to a new, better covenant?
- if the text is about New Covenant, why was a new covenant needed and why is it so much better than the Old?

- if the text is about an Old Testament hero, how is Jesus the better hero?
- if the text is about temple or sabbath or ceremony or feast, how does the shadow find fulfillment in Christ?
- if the text is a story about failure or disappointment or grief or longing, how is Jesus the only true comfort?

TELLING THE “BIG STORY” WITH SMALLER STORIES

The preacher must not only identify a text’s place in the big Gospel story but also remember that it’s stories we crave. Intrigue. Mystery. Surprise endings. Who’s the best-selling fiction author of all time? William Shakespeare (2-4 billion estimated sales). Who is tied with the Bard of Avon? Agatha Christie. Will we pay for a dry documentary? Hardly. But Avatar and Titanic and Star Wars have all grossed over \$2 billion.

I took two courses in British history in college, memorizing every king, queen and important date in Britain’s history. I made A’s in both courses, but all I remember today is that Henry VIII had a lot of wives. I took one course in the Education department because the professor, Gerald Unks, was widely considered the most interesting lecturer at UNC-Chapel Hill (OK, and it was considered an easy “A”). I vividly remember a number of specific lectures from that single semester. I read a book that became the earliest seed of my understanding of blessing, and I mentored an elementary student at a local school. It might have been the best class I took in four years of college. Professor Unks was an avocational actor in the local theater and it showed. He acted out his lectures, putting educational principles on display. He made me curious and interested in a subject that I’d previously given no thought to.

New brain research proves what we have always assumed to be true: curiosity and interest level greatly heighten learning. Researchers have found that when “participants’ curiosity [is] sparked, there [is] not only increased activity in the hippocampus, which is the region of the brain involved in the creation of memories, but also in the brain circuit that is related to reward and pleasure,” (Marianne Stenger, <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/why-curiosity-enhances-learning-marianne-stenger>). When we find something curious or interesting, our brains light up with joy and expectancy.

I think it’s why Jesus taught in story form. He knew how to grab His listeners’ interest. We don’t just love good tales, we learn from them. Frederick Buechner put it this way: “Jesus does not sound like ... Thomas Aquinas ... when we hear him teaching in the Gospels. ‘Once upon a time’ is what he says. Once upon a time somebody went out to plant some seeds. Once upon a time somebody stubbed a toe on a great treasure. Once upon a time somebody lost a precious coin. ... Matthew goes so far as to tell us that ‘he said nothing to them without a parable,’ that is to say without a story,” (“Once Upon A Time,” *Frederick Buechner Center*, November 25, 2017, www.frederickbuechner.com/quote-of-the-day/2017/11/25/once-upon-a-time).

THE POWER OF “ONCE UPON A TIME”

To say “Once upon a time...” is to invite people into an alternative to the mundane, into a mysterious, life-changing reality. An announcement of “once upon a time” is like saying, “Great things have happened in another era and realm, and I want to take you there.” To turn a lovely story into moral lessons is to cheapen it and vandalize its beauty. If we treat the Bible as an instruction book or a collection of principles for better living, we rob the Word of God of its enamoring, transformational goodness.

What makes a great story? We care about the characters. We experience suspense – we wonder what is going to happen. We are surprised. We relate, we connect to the story. We experience tension, conflict that needs resolution.

Regardless of preferred preaching style, preachers can grow in their story-telling skills. For a deep dive into the art of story-telling, I recommend Shawn Coyne (storygrid.com), a renowned editor who teaches writers. He identifies what he calls ‘Five Commandments of Storytelling’ – what every story has to have:

- An inciting incident – an opportunity or problem that disrupts the ordinary (i.e., Dorothy is transported by a tornado in Kansas and wants to get back home).
- Progressive Complication – the conflict escalates, the problem gets worse, the stakes get higher (i.e., Dorothy hears about a wizard, but there’s an evil witch making her journey hard; then, it’s further complicated when she discovers the wizard isn’t real).
- Crisis – because the situation has become more complicated, the character has to choose between two bad things or two good things, and she can’t have both (i.e., Dorothy must decide whether give upon her quest to return home or continue her journey?).
- Climax – the action the character takes in response to the crisis thus revealing the true nature of the character (i.e., Dorothy chooses to continue seeking her own way home).
- Resolution – the outcome of the character’s choice, success or failure, the shift that has taken place. (i.e., Dorothy discovers the secret way home). (taken from <https://storygrid.com/five-commandments-of-storytelling/>)

THE PREACHER AS MISSIONARY

A gorgeous, masterful sermon preached in a language that is foreign to the hearer has no impact. So, we must understand both our text and our listener. We exegete both text and hearer. For us to exegete of our recipients is not only to heed their customs, their idioms, and their native tongue—it is also to think of what they need, what they long for, and what moves them.

The Listener's Longings, Aspirations, and Deepest Needs

Great sermons expose a text's meaning while connecting to a listener's longing. But here's the challenge: the aspiration of the listener might be misguided or unbiblical or even idolatrous (i.e., "I aspire to be popular" or "I want to live a trouble-free life"). The preacher discerns a listener's surface aspiration but brings a Gospel answer to the true and underlying need.

If a sermon does not connect to an important aspiration within the listener, it loses its relevance. If there is no interest or curiosity in the listener's heart, she will tune out and learn little. On the other hand, if a message prioritizes relevance over truth, it loses its Gospel power.

The story is told of a seminarian who submitted a sermon with a bland sermon title for his preaching class. The professor asked the student to come back with a better, more intriguing title. The second sermon title still lacked luster, so the professor gave the student a motivational image: "Imagine your church has a sign out front posting your sermon title," the professor told his student. "Then, imagine that a bus full of people pulls up in front of your church on a Sunday morning and everyone reads the title of your sermon. Think of a title that would make all the passengers want to jump off that bus and run into your church."

The next day, the student submitted his new sermon title: "There's a Bomb on Your Bus."

CONNECTING LISTENER'S DESIRES TO THEIR TRUEST NEEDS

Gospel truth and power applied to deep human need makes a message relevant. So we can pay attention to listener's longings but address them by exposing a text and relating the Good News to the listener's true need.

For example, a listener might want a trouble-free life, but what they really need (and what the Gospel offers) is peace that passes understanding. A listener might want material abundance, but what they need and what the Gospel offers is ultimate security in Christ.

Our hearers might have many noble, true and honorable desires – good marriages, well-behaved kids, or fruitful vocations. They want less anxiety and more peace. Less despair and more joy. Less shame and more confidence. The Gospel speaks to all these longings and so much more. The preacher's task is to expose the text's meaning, "to show them what's really there" (Piper), while connecting the meaning and Gospel power of the text to the listener's aspirations and needs.

INTRODUCTIONS AND THE OPENING "HOOK"

Effective sermon introductions connect the preacher to the listener and the listener to forthcoming content. Because the introduction either arouses interest and curiosity or

not, it's impossible to overstate the importance of the first few minutes of a message because the recipient is deciding whether to lean in and listen.

An excellent, intriguing introduction might incite the listener to think...

- *Hmm, I never thought of that – you've got me intrigued, or*
- *Wow! I'm amazed, shocked – you've got me sitting up in my seat, or*
- *Oh my! I've been complacent, I haven't paid attention before, but I must now, or*
- *Ha ha! This isn't just interesting, this is fun, I feel connected to this speaker, or*
- *What? That seems like it can't be true, that's different than any way I've ever thought about this*

Ineffective introductions cause the listener to feel disconnected, saying to themselves:

- *Ho hum, nothing worth listening to.*
- *Been there, done that – nothing fresh here.*
- *Say what? Too complicated – I don't think I can understand, so I'm tuning out.*
- *So what? What in the world difference does it make to me?*

THE PREACHER AS ARCHITECT

Once we have done the co-creative work of exegesis to expose a text's meaning and have discerned the text's place in the big, Good News story, and have discerned how the text connects to the listener, it is time to plan the message's structure. We now become the architect who needs a blue print upon which to build the sermon.

INDUCTIVE VS. DEDUCTIVE SERMON STRUCTURES

Before crafting any outline, we must decide on a strategy. Will the sermon communicate its message inductively or deductively? *Inductive* structures ask a question or incite an interest that will be fully answered at the end. *Deductive* preaching, on the other hand, declares the main, "take away" message up front and then explains it.

Inductive preaching can be suspenseful, intriguing and inviting because the listener wants to stay attuned, eagerly looking for the end of the story, the meaning of it all. When Peter preached the first Christian sermon in Acts 2, he used the inductive approach. Beginning with the intriguing claim "these men are not drunk," he built his message, quoting Joel and David before finally stating his conclusion: "God has made

him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” The inductive sermon has movements, scenes, plot twists, that unravel a text, surprise the listener and expose the real meaning of the text.

The strength of good, inductive preaching is the opportunity to sustain the listener’s interest. The downside or danger for the inductive sermon is that, along the journey, the exposition of the text might become blurred or lost. In other words, inductive preaching can be intriguing without being clear.

Deductive preaching states the main point, the big idea, up front and often gives a clear road map as well. Deductive sermons are easier for the listener to mentally outline. If the preacher says, “In today’s text we learn that forgiveness is essential for every Christian and we will discover the three bondages of bitterness and the three freedoms of forgiveness,” the listener is poised, wanting to hear each point. The advance knowledge of the outline need not diminish the listener’s interest level. If there is bondage in bitterness, the listener wants to know how to escape it. If there is freedom to be discovered, the listener aspires to the liberty.

The deductive preaching style has the advantage of clarity. It is much less chance that the listener will become confused by the direction of a deductive sermon. But there is a potential downside to deductive sermon structures – without the element of surprise, a deductive sermon can feel predictable.

DAVID AND GOLIATH, FOR EXAMPLE

An inductive sermon on 1 Samuel 17 might begin, *“You’ve heard it said that we all need to be more like David. He was brave. He ran to the battlefield. We need to be more courageous like him – we need to face our giants. But, have you ever noticed that being told how you ought to be more brave doesn’t actually make you brave? Maybe there is a different message in this famous story. Let’s revisit the scene, listen to the giant’s taunts, feel the Israeli army’s fears, and watch what unfolds so that we can discover the Gospel’s power to build our faith.”*

A deductive sermon on 1 Samuel 17 might begin, *“You’ve heard it said that we need to be more like David. He was brave. He ran to the battlefield. We need to be more courageous like him. The problem with that sort of message is that we can’t be brave on our own. We mustn’t read the David and Goliath story moralistically because, when we are told that we ought to be more courageous and we find that we can’t be courageous, we are left empty and ashamed. This story isn’t about what you need to do to face your giants. This is about what God did to face Israel’s giant for them. This is a story about an unlikely hero from Bethlehem who represented all of Israel and defeated the foe for them. This story points us to the ultimate warrior, the real Savior Jesus – who was called the Son of David. In today’s message, we are going to see the problem of the fearful army, the provision of a conqueror, and the power of seeing the hero’s victory.”*

Of course, inductive messages can include deductive sub-points along the way. While

not revealing the culminating point about David as a shadow of Jesus, the inductive sermon might pause to make deductive observations (i.e., “notice the problems of the fearful army – they lacked faith and the more they listened to the taunts, the more afraid they became”). Likewise, deductive outlines can make room for intriguing unanswered questions, along the way (i.e., the army was so fearful that they were paralyzed, but their story doesn’t end with their fear—something happens in their hearts. How does their courage arise?”)

ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustrations serve the exposition of the text. Illustrations create word pictures that arouse interest, establish rapport and build memory. They help the listener “see” the meaning and “feel” its impact. Illustrations also “show” how a message is applied. (I’d rather have a picture showing me how to assemble a bicycle rather than words.)

Haddon Robinson’s ranking of illustrations’ effectiveness is helpful:

1. The speaker’s and the listener’s lived experience overlap.
2. The speaker’s learned experience overlaps with the listener’s lived experience.
3. The speaker’s lived experience overlaps with the listener’s learned experience.
4. The speaker’s learned experience overlaps the listener’s learned experience.
5. The speaker’s lived or learned experience does not overlap with the listener’s lived or learned experience

(see Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, p. 167 for a helpful graphic).

If the best illustrations intersect our life experience and the listener’s life experience, it’s best to live on the lookout for ways that God might be speaking through our lives and others. There are a variety of ways to capture thoughts—filing them, annotating them, assigning them key words, dictating them. Adopt any method, but capture them! Spiritual insights often dart in and out of consciousness and, like a dream, if not recorded, can feel lost forever.

In using illustrations, I want ALWAYS to:

- let the illustration serve the text, not vice versa
- use only illustrations that are truly relevant to the message
- enjoy the illustration personally (if it’s boring to me I can’t tell it well)
- assure that the listener makes the connection with the illustration’s truth

Then, WHEN POSSIBLE:

- derive illustrations from experiences, books, stories, movies or individuals which I'd feel OK about listener's connecting to that source
- use illustrations that are, in some way, personal to me or to the listeners (Haddon's category 1)
- use illustrations that are multi-faceted-- ones help illuminate the breadth of the text's truth for the day

But a preacher should NEVER:

- impose an illustration onto a text just because it is so funny, so poignant, or so heart-stirring it must be used
- share a story learned in confidence without permission (even if the name and situation is changed so that others might not know)
- use an illustration that disparages someone, especially a family member
- steal an illustration from another source without attributing it or acknowledging that it isn't original

A BLESSING FOR PREACHERS

With so much that could be said about the process of preaching from text to table, it is fitting to close with a blessing for all preachers. They are the words John Piper:

After a full day's "fruitless" labor over his word, distressed at the lateness of the hour, on your knees, through tears, in one five-second flash you will see the reality of the text. You will apprehend in an instant how the text works. It is a gift. He will make sure you know this. Again and again. Your labor for his glory, in the name of Jesus, for the good of his people, will never be in vain. (<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/nothing-can-replace-preaching>, June 24, 2019)

Note: Please read or listen to (using the link) the message by Sam Storms that follows. It will be used as an example in the presentation at Theological Roundtable.

ADDENDUM: SUPPLEMENT TO ALAN WRIGHT'S PAPER

2 TIMOTHY 1:8-14

Sam Storms - Bridgeway Church - 1/17/10

[Link to Audio](#)

What is the Gospel? It seems like such a simple question that calls for a quick and easy answer, a question on which all who know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior will surely answer with complete agreement. Well, perhaps in some ideal past that may have been true, but no longer.

Now, I'm not an alarmist by nature. I'm inclined to dismiss those who cry wolf or tell us that the sky is falling, and I'm especially impatient with last days fanaticism that insists the second coming of Christ is just around the corner (although, in the case of this latter prediction, I hope and pray they are right!).

But I am alarmed and greatly concerned by something in our day and I am quite fanatical about alerting the body of Christ to what is happening. I'm talking, of course, about the **morphing** and **muting** of the gospel. By the "morphing" of the gospel I simply mean the many ways in which it is changing and being re-defined and re-cast in a way, so we are told, that is more compatible with the post-modern world in which we live. By the "muting" of the gospel I simply mean the tragic silence when it comes to proclaiming the gospel to a lost and dying world.

So what is the Gospel? And aside from believing it, what is our responsibility with regard to it? And what does it mean when we say that Bridgeway is a gospel-centered church? These are among the questions that I want to address today, and there is no better passage to provide us with those answers than 2 Timothy 1:8-14. I'll try to do it by highlighting seven exhortations found in Paul's statement to Timothy.

(1) Resist, through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, the gospel-muting effect of shame (v. 8a).

There is much in the gospel of Jesus Christ that we do not fully grasp, and the diversity of our reactions to it is thus somewhat understandable. Its *purity* often causes us to recoil in dread and sometimes fear. Its *simplicity* evokes in us incredulous wonder and amazement. Its *mysterious* operations create in us an attitude of reverent suspense. Its *beauty* stirs our hearts in unending praise. That it is *sovereign* and *free* elicits from our lips words of gratitude and a sense of unworthiness. **The glorious gospel of JC, namely, that God should save sinners from his own wrath through the death of his own Son, awakens a multitude of emotions and thoughts and affections and reactions.**

But surely it is an incontestable proof of the deep and sinister depravity of the human soul that the gospel of JC should ever produce shame or embarrassment in those who profess to be the recipients of its blessings. Could a greater perversity exist than that man, so desperately in need of redeeming grace, should become faint and shy when called upon to make known both in word and deed his belief and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ?

As the apostle Paul sat in his prison cell, perhaps only weeks or at most months away from death at the hands of a Roman executioner, that thought weighed heavily on his heart. Paul was a man of great experience and even greater wisdom, and he knew well the inclinations of the human heart. He knew that the pressures of society, the appeal of riches, the rear of persecution, together with the lies of the Devil can assault the believer's soul and woo and coax him to soft-pedal the gospel, to pare off its rough edges, and most of all, to recoil and withdraw in shame.

Paul knew that Timothy was faced with innumerable problems in the church at Ephesus. He knew how powerful would be the temptation to grow silent from embarrassment or intimidation. So, he says in no uncertain terms, Timothy, "Don't be ashamed of the testimony concerning Jesus or of me his prisoner."

The relationship between vv. 8-11 and what Paul said earlier in vv. 6-7 is highlighted by the linking word, "therefore". There is in vv. 6-7, lurking just beneath the surface of Paul's words, his concern that Timothy might balk or hesitate in fulfilling his gospel ministry. Perhaps Timothy was shy by nature. Perhaps he was frail in terms of his physical frame. Perhaps he was unsure of himself. We know he was somewhat young and thus easily intimidated by older and more forceful men. Add to this the threat of persecution, imprisonment, and death, and you can understand why Paul reminded him in vv. 6-7 that God had not only imparted to him the requisite spiritual gifts to fulfill his ministry but also "a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."

No matter how inadequate you may feel, no matter how inferior you may think you are in comparison with others, *God has given each of you everything you need to be fearless and faithful in gospel ministry.*

"Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord" (v. 8a).

The exhortation should not be taken as a veiled accusation that Timothy was already, in fact, ashamed and had acted in a cowardly way. The force of the Greek tense here (aorist, rather than present) is: "Be careful lest you become ashamed." Or, "Don't start experiencing shame."

Think for a moment of all the **possible reasons** why Timothy and you and I might shrink back in shame.

(1) Loss of material wealth. Or perhaps instead, the prospect of gaining material

wealth if we would only keep silent in our witness.

- (2) Threat of persecution. Or perhaps instead, the soul-numbing effect of creaturely comforts and conveniences and ease of life that we might gain if we keep silent.
- (3) Loss of respect from our peers.
- (4) The fear of having to stand alone.
- (5) For Timothy himself, and less so for you and me, the greatest potential cause for shrinking back in shame was the cross itself. See 1 Cor. 1:18ff.

From a **human** or **worldly** point of view, there is much of which one might be ashamed in the gospel. For example, assault on human pride (1 Cor. 1), undermining of human works, contrary to human boasting, requirement of confession of utter depravity and helplessness. Even if we today do not find the “cross” to be the cause of embarrassment, **the gospel is still antithetical to the desire for worldly success, acclaim, and self-centered ambition and thus will invariably tend to induce shame and embarrassment in those who cherish those worldly and secular values.**

To faithfully proclaim the gospel means cutting across the grain of popular beliefs: that all go to heaven, that no religion is superior to another, that you have a corner on the truth and others are deceived, that the supernatural is real, that the Bible is inspired and authoritative, etc.

However, it’s **one thing to be told by Paul not to be ashamed of the gospel. But how does one do that?** What is the cure to this disease of self-protection and ambition and fear that so often paralyzes and mutes our witness?

Answer: *A personal knowledge of the gospel itself! A personal experience of the saving mercy of Christ Jesus!*

Think about it: the only reason why you and I are not even now suffering eternal torment is because of God’s saving grace shown us in Christ. The only reason!

Although it is not explicit in the text, please **note the connection between v. 8 and vv. 9-10.** The details of what is wrapped up in the gospel in vv. 9-11 are laid out for us to buttress the exhortation of v. 8. **Look at what God has done for you in eternity past!** Meditate on what Christ has done for you at Calvary! Think again on how it is only simple, sovereign grace that accounts for this! How then can one possibly be ashamed!

He picks up this theme again in v. 12, with only a slightly different emphasis: “But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed . . .”

Cf. **Romans 1:16-17.** This is a figure of speech called “antenantiosis” in which an author

uses the negative in order to express the positive in high degree. E.g., “He is no fool” = “He is incredibly brilliant.” Or, “I praise you not” = “I greatly blame you” (1 Cor). Or, “I do not want you to be ignorant” = “I really want you to be wholly knowledgeable”.

Hence, in Romans 1:16 Paul is saying, “The gospel is my greatest boast! The gospel is my greatest glory! I am indescribably proud of the gospel!”

Paul’s delight in the gospel and his call for Timothy and for you and me to be likewise is ultimately due to one factor: the gospel can do what nothing else in life can do.

The gospel can accomplish what education cannot. Yes, education broadens the mind and enlightens the understanding and captivates the imagination, but it is powerless to convert the soul and renew the spirit and fill the heart with joy in Jesus!

The gospel can accomplish what science cannot. Yes, science can improve the quality of our lives on earth and protect us from infectious diseases and create devices that improve our communication. But it cannot redeem us from sin or impart forgiveness or give us hope in the face of death.

The gospel can accomplish what technology cannot. I’m grateful for technology, for the airline industry that enabled me to come to England, for the laptop computer on which I do my work and write my books, for the heating systems that keep us warm and the air conditioning systems that keep us cool. But technology cannot regenerate our hearts or bring us into the true knowledge of God.

Praise God for nuclear energy and economic development and the entertainment industry and athletics and the international banking system. But for all their good, they cannot do what the gospel can. They cannot give us God. But the gospel can!

That is why Paul spoke of all the praise and honor and achievement and recognition this world offers as dung, as refuse, when compared with the surpassing excellency of knowing Jesus Christ and experiencing the power of his resurrection.

And that is also the only ultimate reason or basis on which you and I will be able to heed this exhortation. Remember the gospel! Reflect on the gospel! Meditate on its truths, pray over them, fight for them, keep them ever in the forefront of your thinking and joyfully on your lips.

(2) Embrace suffering as an essential and inevitable blessing in gospel ministry (v. 8b).

Here is a test to apply to all who claim to be teaching and preaching the biblical gospel.

If they suggest, imply, or even merely hint that embracing the gospel will insulate a person from suffering, affliction, hardships, or trial, they are not proclaiming the biblical gospel. If they suggest that somehow wrapped up in the gospel is the promise of financial, physical, and social prosperity, they are not proclaiming the biblical gospel.

ILLUS: Brit Hume and his comments on Fox News that Tiger Woods should turn to Christianity where he can find redemption and forgiveness of sins, something not available to him in Buddhism or any other religion . . . Hume suffered from ridicule, denunciation, criticism, mockery; he was laughed at, held up for rebuke and slander. Yet he stood firm, came back on the air and repeated, without regret, his earlier comments.

(3) Be diligent to identify and boldly articulate the gospel in all its dimensions (vv. 9-10)

Much debate today about the content of the gospel. Yet, Paul couldn't have been clearer in vv. 9-10 concerning its core, its essence: *The gospel itself is primarily concerned with God's gracious saving activity in Jesus Christ.*

Immediately after his reference to the "gospel" for which we should readily suffer, Paul launches into this majestic portrayal of what that gospel is: **it is God's saving activity in Christ, spanning eternity past into eternity future!** Everything else must flow out of this foundational truth. Without this truth there is no gospel.

The logic is clear: If God has saved Timothy, he can also empower him to live out his calling in the midst of suffering. The same applies to you and me!

There is a tendency today either to shrink the gospel or to expand it, both of which, by the way, are typically done in reaction to the other.

- (1) Often people are tempted to shrink the gospel by adapting it to the particular cultural context in which they live and minister. **Question:** But is the gospel that we embody and preach to those who live in London / Chicago / OKC different from the gospel that we embody and preach to those in the slums of Bangladesh? Is the gospel that I share over coffee with a university student different from the gospel I share with a single mother of three who barely survives on welfare?
- (2) On the other hand, we can also do damage to the gospel by expanding it to encompass virtually everything. In other words, if we make the gospel mean everything, it ends up meaning nothing. We must differentiate between what the gospel is and what are its inevitable or intended consequences. **Illus:** The gospel **is** the work of Christ in reconciling us to God, but the intended consequence is that we also be reconciled to one another. The gospel **is**

redemption of body, soul, and spirit through faith in Jesus, but the intended consequence is that this redemption extend to the natural creation and the deliverance of creation from the curse. The gospel is justification by faith alone in Christ alone, but the intended consequence is that it lead to the alleviation of poverty and suffering and homelessness.

Loving God with all my heart, soul, and mind and my neighbor as myself is of critical importance: but that isn't the gospel.

Taking note of Martin Luther King Day tomorrow and being both aware of and actively engaged in the pursuit of civil rights is essential for all Christians: but that is not the gospel.

Acknowledging Right to Life Sunday and actively working on behalf of the unborn is crucial: but it is not the gospel.

Sharing your personal testimony of a radically changed life is something all of us should do: but that is not the gospel.

In other words, the gospel must not be confused with what it produces. The **content** of the gospel is one thing; its **consequences** are another. There is a difference between essence and entailment.

The gospel is not: moral behavior; the gospel is not social action; the gospel is not raising money to fight the spread of AIDS in Africa; care for creation; interpersonal reconciliation; good deeds; feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, housing the homeless. All these things are of crucial importance and Christian men and women should be encouraged to give of their time and money and energy to support these activities. But these activities are not the gospel. **The gospel is God's activity**, his action, his work in and through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to secure the forgiveness of sins of those who repent and trust in what he has done.

My concern here, because it is Paul's concern, is with what the gospel is:

- (a) Essential to the gospel message is the pre-temporal origin of saving grace. Election is important to the gospel! Saving grace was given to us before we were born! We were in God's mind and purpose and the gift of saving grace was found in the pre-existent Christ.
- (b) The saving grace of the gospel is found only in Christ Jesus (exclusivity!). Contra inclusivism of today.
- (c) Also here is the fact of the Incarnation – cf. 1 John 4:1-6. The word “appearing” = epiphany (see 1 Tim. 6:14), most likely a reference to the historical appearing in human flesh of the Word.

- (d) He emphasizes the unveiling of eternal life in the midst of a darkened world and humanity. Focus is on triumph over death and the shining forth of eternal life. And it is only through the gospel that the illumination of eternal life in Christ can occur. Exclusivity!

If we still die, in what sense was death “destroyed”? Sting of death as punishment for sin has been abolished (1 Cor. 15:54-56). Fear of death (Heb. 2) is gone. Death has lost its power to hold us or to prevent our inheriting what God has promised. “Abolish” – to make powerless, to annul.

- (e) Essential to the gospel is the promise and hope of resurrection! Note the emphasis on the resurrection body, incorruptible and immortal. Newsweek of Feb 2, 2009. More than 80% of Americans believe they are going to “heaven” when they die. But more than 33% believe heavenly life is wholly spiritual, devoid of a physical body.

- (f) There is no gospel apart from a grasp of the nature and purpose of Christ’s atoning death. PSA!

The gospel has not been preached:

- if sin is not identified (it is a personal offense against the holiness and righteousness of God, not personal hurts or emotional and psychological dysfunction),
- if the wrath of God is not made known,
- if repentance is not urgently required,
- if justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone is not made clear.

(4) Unashamed suffering for the gospel and successful gospel proclamation must be rooted in relational intimacy with Jesus Christ (v. 12a).

“I am not ashamed,” says Paul, “for I know whom I have believed” (v. 12a). There’s no other way to put it: the secret to Paul’s attitude, the source of Paul’s strength, and the center of his gospel was a Person.

He does not say “I know what I have believed,” although that is very important! Without accurate information about Jesus, love for him is mere infatuation. So, yes, on the one hand, to know Jesus is to be joyously acquainted with facts about his promised coming, identity of his person, nature and necessity of his life, death, resurrection; second coming, etc.

But Paul has something else in view here. He is talking about a “knowing” that is personal, relational, intimate, and joyful.

Illus: Dr. James Alexander of Princeton University was on his death bed. His wife quoted this passage to comfort him in his final hours, but she was guilty of a small inaccuracy: "I know **in** whom I have believed." Although near dead, Dr. Alexander corrected his wife: "It isn't 'I know in whom I have believed,' but 'I know whom I have believed.'" He was unwilling for even a preposition to slip in between himself and his Savior!

Read Philippians 3:7-9.

The key is found in what Paul identifies as **the ground or motive** for his decision: it was **because of Christ** . . . It was *the prospect of gaining Christ*, the promise of all that God is for him in Jesus that provoked and stirred and stimulated him and accounts for his re-evaluation of everything in his life. Paul says it no fewer than 8 times!

(1) "for the sake of Christ" (v. 7a)

(2) "in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ" (v. 8a)

"the overwhelming gain"

"the unparalleled worth"

"the supreme advantage"

"the ultimate value"

"the surpassing greatness"

"the incomparable excellence" . . . of knowing Jesus!

(3) "for whom I have suffered the loss of all things" (v. 8b)

He didn't suffer loss in a vacuum. He willingly suffered loss **for a person, to gain a person, to embrace and be embraced by a person**: Jesus. Note also: it is "whatever things" (v. 7) and "all things" (v. 8). If what Paul said "NO" to is not relevant to you, he makes it clear: whatever it might be . . .

(4) "in order that I may gain Christ" (v. 8c)

To lose or to give up or to forfeit or to turn away from something without a reason, namely, *to get something infinitely better*, is crazy. Note that it is Christ himself, not his blessings or favor or gifts but the person of the Son of God himself . . . His decision was not grounded in fear, shame, boredom, etc. It was "because of Christ", it was the hope of getting more and better and greater and more beautiful and more satisfying . . . in Christ.

(5) "in order that I may be found in Him" (v. 9)

Whether in Rome or Philippi or Antioch or _____, whether healthy or sick or worried or care free or wealthy or poor, it only matters that I be "in Him." Thus, Paul

says, "Not only do I want to get/gain Christ; I want to get *in* Christ! I want to find Him and then be found in Him."

(6) "in order that I may know Him" (v. 10a)

Cf. *"The sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him"* (2 Cor. 2:14).

(7) "in order that I may know the power of His resurrection" (v. 10b)

(8) "in order that I may know the fellowship of His death" (v. 10c)

This is what I'm extending to you today. This is what is being offered in the gospel: a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, Lord of the universe, Sovereign over all of creation. To know him. To love him. To follow him. To relish the greatness of his power. To rejoice in the forgiveness he provides. To . . .

(5) Cultivate confidence in God's commitment to you (v. 12b).

"I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me."

Again, this is related to his willingness to suffer for the gospel and his determination never to feel shame because of it.

A low view of God yields a low tolerance of pain! A diminished view of God's power and a hesitant confidence in his promises produces both cowardice and compromise. To the degree that you doubt the goodness and greatness of God, you will withdraw into a cocoon of self-protection and silence. Flowing out of that confidence in God is the strength that you would otherwise lack.

Paul appears to be attributing his perseverance and persistence and devotion to his confident knowledge of the fact that God is committed to guarding on Paul's behalf what Paul has committed or entrusted to God.

Literally, "my deposit" – Used in ancient world of something precious, some item of property entrusted to another for safekeeping; to which one returns confident that it will be there.

But is the "deposit" something God has entrusted to Paul, namely the gospel message, or is it something Paul has entrusted to God? Perhaps his life, eternal welfare and destiny?

It is difficult to know, and of course both are true. But what is of greatest importance is that you and I grow and mature in our confidence in the greatness of God to accomplish for us and through us his perfect will.

(6) Pursue in life, devotion, and ministry the whole counsel of God (v. 13).

The gospel is doctrine (v. 13a). “Pattern of sound words”. Implications (not merely actions or deeds or drama or entertainment or feelings or emotions, etc.). There is a “pattern” (i.e., boundaries, definitions, parameters, criteria by which to determine what is part of it and true and what is outside boundaries and false).

“Follow” = lit., “hold to,” keep a tight grip on the gospel in your personal life; embrace it, cherish it, feed on it, immerse your soul in it; preach it to yourself; remind yourself of it regularly, etc.

The gospel of truth entrusted to you consists of “sound words” or “healthy words” because they impart spiritual health and wholeness and well-being to those who embrace it.

It is the gospel that first united Paul and Timothy (vv. 9-10) and now it is the gospel that provides the organic link in the on-going mission. The central element that connects one generation of leaders with the next is the gospel itself!

(7) Guard the gospel! Defend and fight for truth against all distortions, deviations, and diminishment, through the HS (v. 14).

First, observe that the “gospel” is something God has “entrusted” to human beings like Paul and Timothy and you and me. God has come to each of us and said: “Here, take this infinitely precious truth, this gloriously gracious message of what I’ve done for sinners through my Son. I’m putting it in your hands. I’m trusting you with it. I’m counting on you to recognize the immeasurable importance of what is at stake. Take good care of it!”

Note Paul’s emphasis once again on passing on the gospel from one trustworthy person to another. Paul was entrusted with the gospel (1 Tim. 1:11; 2:7; Titus 1:3; 2 Tim. 1:11); he in turn entrusted it to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 1:13-14; 2:2; 3:14); and Timothy in turn is to entrust it to others (2 Tim. 2:2).

Has anyone ever “entrusted” something valuable to you? What steps did you take to ensure that it would be protected and kept from corruption or theft or dissolution?

This passage makes sense only on the assumption that the gospel is and will be continually under attack. There will never be a cease fire or a lull in hostilities. It will not always be a full frontal assault, but will often take the form of a back door dilution of essential truths. Sometimes the attack on the gospel is actually made to look like its defense!

People don’t like the gospel. To them, it is anything but good news: their sin, God’s wrath, sincerity alone isn’t enough; only one way; good works won’t cut it; not

everyone is saved; trust in Christ alone is essential. These are all under attack. They are offensive truths.

Implies that we will always be confronted with those attacking it, redefining it, reformulating it, etc.

See 1 Tim. 6:20. Note in that verse the fact that there is “error” that can be identified and from which we must turn aside as essential to fulfilling the task of “guarding”.

Note: if it was God who was guarding the deposit/gospel earlier, here it is Timothy (and us) who do it. How do we do it? Through the Spirit. Hence, it is ultimately God at every stage who guards the gospel, both directly and indirectly through human agency energized by the Spirit.

How we defend the gospel is critically important (v. 14). Be sure your ministry and defense of the gospel is characterized not only by faithfulness to the truth but by faith and love. These qualities are not natural to humans but come from the Spirit.

But how does one hold to the gospel “in faith and love”? What does this mean?

Faith and love is Paul’s way of referring to the authentic life we live in relationship with God and others.

Timothy is to keep the standard while trusting God (faith) and loving others (love).

Essential to guarding the gospel is making it known, preaching and proclaiming and teaching and telling the good news! Read 2 Tim. 2:8; 4:1-2; 4:17.

You’ve probably heard the old saying: “Preach the gospel; if necessary, use words.” Contrary to what some have told you, Francis of Assisi did not say that!

It is pious nonsense! Tell me your phone number; if necessary use digits!

Of course, it is true that words alone divorced from godly, loving, compassionate lives will accomplish very little. Hypocrisy cripples gospel proclamation. But the gospel is by definition good “news” to be proclaimed and one simply cannot do that without words!

Conclusion:

So what does it mean to be gospel-centered?

- (1) The gospel constitutes the core of our message.
- (2) The gospel exerts a controlling influence on all we believe

(3) All of life finds its foundational energy in the gospel: we forgive others because God in Christ has forgiven us (Eph. 4:32); loving one another (Eph. 5:2); we endure suffering for the sake of the gospel; we don't lie to each other or slander one another because of our unity in the gospel; we humbly defer to one another, preferring one another to ourselves because of the gospel (Phil. 2); our hope for the future is grounded in what God has done in the past ("Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again"; future tense is rooted in the past tense); husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the church (Eph. 5).

(4) Phil. 1:27