

GOD WITH US

Part 11: LATER LETTERS

Message 3 – Pastoral Epistles

Paul's Final Letter

2 Timothy 1, 2

Introduction

Paul was in a Roman prison cell when he wrote his endearing letter known as 2nd Timothy. He had been arrested a 2nd time by the Romans and had already made his defense in court. It now appeared certain to Paul that his execution would come soon. Winter was near; the prison cell was lonely and cold. Only Luke, his beloved friend and ministry companion, was with him. He wrote to Timothy and asked him to come quickly to Rome, bringing his cloak and his books (parchments). But more than a request for Timothy to come, this was Paul's heart opening up and passing the torch of faith to his dearest beloved spiritual son. Paul writes, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith"* (4:7). He was ready to go to meet Jesus in heaven . . . but he wanted to breathe courage into the heart of Timothy, who had many years still ahead in his own race. There are 83 verses in this letter, and at least 54 of them are about finishing, fighting, enduring and being faithful. These are Paul's "last words" and they still serve as a powerful encouragement for us today.

There is no better letter in the New Testament by which we gain a true grasp of the passion of the Apostle Paul. This is one of those short little books that, if you read it many times over, it will have a big impact on your life. Shirley and I were greatly impacted by this book early in our Christian journey. We encourage you to read it often and let its message sink deeply into your heart.

Opening Greeting: 1:1,2

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to THE PROMISE OF LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS, to Timothy, my beloved son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (1:1,2).

"The promise of life" was at the forefront of Paul's thinking when he set his pen to parchment. Rome was going to kill him for

preaching Christ to the world; but Paul was not afraid of the death sentence because *the promise of eternal life* was alive in his heart. As he had written to the Philippians: *For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain (1:21)*. At the close of this letter, he will write again of his confident hope:

“The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom” . . . (2Tim.4:18).

What a fitting way to open up a letter as he faced death – with a clear announcement of his belief in life after death!

Three Remembers: 1:3-5

Paul used the word “remember” 3 times in the next 3 verses. He was remembering certain things about Timothy.

“I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly REMEMBER you in my prayers night and day, longing to see you, even as I REMEMBER your tears, so that I may be filled with joy. For I REMEMBER the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well” (1:3-5).

He longed to see Timothy, but distance separated them by 1,000 miles. So, Paul constantly *remembered* Timothy in prayer.

We may be separated from others physically; but prayer gives us the opportunity to link up with anyone, anywhere, anytime. Every time you remember someone, simply turn that remembrance into a prayer. You may not even know specifically what are their most pressing needs, but the Lord knows all about their needs. So, you can pray a verse from the Bible, or simply ask the Lord to be at work in their life and their current concerns and circumstances. This is the most powerful thing you can do for other people: pray for them. Turn every remembrance into a prayer.

Secondly, he *remembered* Timothy’s tears. There was a deep spiritual and emotional bond between Paul and Timothy. It is interesting to see how people reacted when Paul left them. Timothy wept when Paul left. The Ephesians wept when Paul left (Acts 20). Those tears show that Paul was more than just their teacher. He really loved them as people, and they knew it. He was their beloved spiritual father.

Third, he *remembered* Timothy’s sincere faith. The word “sincere”

means “no play-acting.” Timothy’s faith was not fake; it was genuine. His mother and grandmother had this same kind of genuine faith, and they played a key role in passing that quality of faith along to Timothy. Timothy’s heritage of faith was rich on his mother’s side. He was 3rd generation. This was a good reminder of the *entrustment* passed down. His father appears not to have been a man of faith (Acts 16:1); nevertheless, these two women began teaching Timothy about God and His Word from infancy, when Timothy was very young- little ones can learn much. It is never too early (3:15)!

If you are alone in your efforts to cultivate faith in your children (without the help of a spouse), take heart – let Lois and Eunice, mother and grandmother, encourage you to be diligent. Perhaps you were raised in a home where one or both parents were not people of faith. Don’t let that stop you from developing your own sincere and deep faith in Christ. God can bring spiritual fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters into your life to help you grow in your faith. Make it your goal to grow strong in your faith, and to be a turning point in your family line, so that those who come after you will know what sincere faith looks like, as they learn to believe in Jesus and walk with Him from you.

One Reminder: 1:6,7

As this letter opens, Paul has one strong admonition for Timothy.

“And for this reason, I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline” (1:6,7).

When Paul as an Apostle, laid his hands on Timothy, Timothy received certain spiritual gifts for ministry (1Tim. 4:14). In the account of the early church (Acts 6:6: 13:3), it was a common practice. Today, this type of ceremonial tradition of prayer and laying hands on to a person or a couple is continued, but it is not specifically connected with spiritual gifts being bestowed by the Holy Spirit.

When we become a Christian, God places His Spirit within us, and with the Spirit comes a ‘spiritual-gift’ package. (*Part 10, Message 8: 1Corinthians 12-16; p. 1,255-1,266 focuses on the topic of spiritual gifts, ending with a detailed descriptive list of spiritual gifts*). These are Spirit-given abilities that God wants to use for the advancement of His purposes in the world. They are powerful tools

for the work of God, and they are gifts that, when used, bring you great personal satisfaction. Thus, every Christian has one of two options with their God-given spiritual-gifts: Either let these gifts smolder like a fire that is about to go out, or fan them into a flame so that they are used to give heat and light to a needy world. Paul accompanies this admonition with an encouragement:

“For God has NOT given us a spirit of TIMIDITY, BUT of POWER and LOVE and DISCIPLINE” (1:7).

The word “timidity” there means cowardice, or fear; shrinking back. Perhaps Timothy had the kind of personality that did not like conflict. Paul says: *Fan your gifts into a flame and don't be timid about it, because God will give you what you need as you live for Him. You will find supernatural power in the face of weakness, love in the face of hatred, and discipline (a sound mind) in the face of confusion.*

Be NOT ASHAMED: 1:8-18

Paul uses the word “ashamed” 3 times in this section. Many were running away from him in this hour, because they were afraid to take a stand for Christ and to suffer. Jesus told His disciples as He was soon to be taken up into heaven, *“But you will receive POWER when the HOLY SPIRIT has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses...” (Acts 1:8).* A little background will help us see the difficulty these early Christians were facing.

Rome had just suffered a huge fire, destroying nearly half the city. Nero returned from a trip and led the fire brigades himself. But when it was over, Nero blamed it on the Christians because some of them had been talking about “the fire” of God’s judgment. Tacitus, the Roman historian, picks it up there:

“Nero put forward as guilty and afflicted with the most exquisite punishments, those who were hated for their abominations and called ‘Christians’ by the populace. Christus, from whom the name was derived, was punished by the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius. The noxious form of religion, checked for a time, broke out again not only in Judea its original home, but also throughout Rome... Therefore, first of all those who confessed to being Christians were arrested, and then as a result of their information a large number were implicated, not so much on the charge of having set the fire as for hatred of the human race. They died by methods of mockery; some were covered with the skins of wild beasts and then torn by dogs, some

were crucified, some were burned as torches to light the night ... Finally after scenes of extreme cruelty sympathy was stirred for them ... for men felt that their destruction was not on account of the public welfare but to gratify the cruelty of one Nero . . .”

Against that backdrop, read Paul’s words slowly and thoughtfully:

“Therefore DO NOT BE ASHAMED of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher. For this reason I also suffer these things, but I AM NOT ASHAMED; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day” (1:8-12).

As in Romans 1:17, Paul boldly declares here that he was “*not ashamed*” of the message of Christ. He knew that Jesus had ABOLISHED DEATH and brought IMMORTALITY to those who believed in Him. He knew WHO he had believed in, and he knew WHERE he would go when he died.

People who want to use “power-over” intimidation strategies to cause us to shut-up or back-down from fear of us losing a relationship, job, friendship, position, etc. and cause us shame, are usually skilled in their strategies. We therefore need reminders that although outwardly the pressure can seem too strong, and we have much to lose, we have a stronger power – the Holy Spirit – Who dwells within every believer in Jesus Christ. HE is able to help us overcome their intimidation, shame and even our fear of consequences and even death. As Paul reminded Timothy, so we all can be challenged to remember that the Holy Spirit’s power is able to keep us from giving in to powerful people who try to use their strategies to cause us to shut-up and back-down. Who or what is intimidating you? How will Paul’s words to Timothy inspire and instruct you?

Paul will return to the theme of living unashamed, but here he inserts an admonition to remain strong in the truth. This insertion was probably due to the fact that he had just rehearsed the basic elements of *the gospel message* in the previous lines (note how he uses the

word “gospel” twice, 1:9,10). Timothy must *guard* this precious gospel since it is the most valuable thing on earth!

“Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you” (1:13,14).

“Retain the standard of sound words . . . Guard the treasure.” Paul repeats himself for emphasis. The gospel had been transferred from Paul to Timothy. Now, Timothy was being admonished to guard that treasure with his entire life, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul says: *Don't let anyone twist the gospel. Don't let anyone add to or take away from the gospel. Don't let anyone steal this sacred treasure. Keep it safe! Guard it well!*

Do you see the gospel as a “treasure” that must be guarded? Is it precious to YOU? Do you know that if you have received the words of the gospel into your own heart, you possess a very sacred treasure within you? The gospel: Christ Jesus, God the Son, came into the world to relate as one of us, yet Holy and blameless. He died at the hands of the Romans and Jews, and the will of the Father, as an eternal sacrifice for the sins of all humanity. For all those who hear and believe, God grants them forgiveness and eternal life. Ask God who He wants you to share the treasure of the gospel with. There is no greater joy in this life than to lead another person to believe in Christ, and begin a life of forgiveness and a personal relationship with God, that Jesus provides, both now and for eternity! You hold more than a message – you hold the “gospel” and it is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

There were those who had become ashamed and had deserted Paul in the course of his imprisonment and trials. At the same time, in the midst of such desertions, there was one man who remained unashamed of Christ and of Paul, His servant.

“You are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus for he often refreshed me, and WAS NOT ASHAMED of my chains; but when he was in Rome, he eagerly searched for me, and found me - the Lord grant to him to find mercy from the Lord on that day - and you know very well what services he rendered at Ephesus (1:15-18).

Onesiphorus is one of those minor characters in the Bible (only mentioned here and 4:18) who played a major role. He courageously searched for Paul during his Roman imprisonment, (at the risk of guilt by association) bringing refreshment when there was no one else to do so. Such courage in the face of danger reveals just how much Onesiphorus trusted Jesus with his life, his safety, and his destiny.

Remember what Jesus said: "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38). Jesus came into this world and publicly suffered a humiliating death for us. He invites us to suffer whatever humiliation necessary to identify as His follower and to share His love with a world in need of Him. Are you willing to take a risk to identify with Jesus in the face of potential scorn, mockery, shame or rejection?

Be FAITHFUL 2:1-26

In the 2nd chapter, Paul gives 8 word-pictures that would etch themselves on Timothy's memory banks forever. These are all, in different ways, pictures of the faithful servant of God.

1. The Faithful Steward

"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also" (2:1,2).

God has chosen to use faithful men and women to advance His kingdom work here on planet earth. Thus, everything depends on the faithful transmission of the message from one person to the next – life-on-life discipleship. One person after receiving Christ as Savior, accepts and embodies the teachings of Christ, and then pours out the same into the life of another person. That is the way God has designed Christianity to continue and to advance in the world: person-to-person through a process of spiritual reproduction. This requires each of us to be faithful stewards of the faith and the truths that we have been taught... *Paul to Timothy to faithful followers to others also.*

2. The Good Soldier

“Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier” (2:3,4).

Timothy had suffered hardship while being a companion in the ministry with Paul. Paul was challenging Timothy to continue to “suffer hardship as a good soldier who is in active service”. A good soldier on active duty is willing to suffer hardship. That is the very nature of a soldier’s life. A good soldier must also remain focused. You can’t be a soldier and get tied up in everyday civilian affairs. You have to make some choices as a soldier, and the primary choice is to prioritize your life around the assignment your commanding officer has given to you. Divided interests do not make for dedicated soldiers.

Occupation vs. preoccupation. This is a helpful way to balance the idea of being a dedicated soldier and yet still fulfilling the other “normal” duties of our lives. Your occupation may call you to work, or to teach, or to raise a family, or to be in school. All of these are important duties for a follower of Jesus. Yet, while you “occupy” these roles in life, make it your ‘preoccupation’ to serve Jesus in those very settings. You can be “a good soldier” fulfilling the mandates of your Captain (Jesus) even as you go to school, raise a family, or care for aging parents. Being a good soldier is a matter of perspective. It is seeing every opportunity, every place, every role as an assignment from God to serve Him there.

3. The Lawful Athlete

“And also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules” (2:5).

Paul looked like he had lost the game and his reward as he sat in prison with only Luke, and was awaiting his execution. Yet from God’s view, Paul had run his race faithfully, according to God’s call on his life. He had run according to God’s rules. He now could look forward to the “crown” (2Tim.4:8) that would be awarded to Him and the words Jesus would say, “*Well done you good and faithful servant...*” (Matt.25:21).

The athlete competes “lawfully” (literally in Greek). The Roman athletes competed according to very strict rules; even during the

training period leading up to the event. They had their own ancient version of a rule-book. If anywhere along the way they were found to be violating any of the rules of the play-book, they were disqualified. Paul was saying to Timothy that the race of the Christian life (and specifically God's calling), is something like that. God gives us a play-book to guide us in our race. He gives us instructions, guidelines, prohibitions and permissions . . . and He asks us to run our race according to these guidelines found in His Word. (Paul uses the race & reward analogy in 1Corinthians 9:24-27. He speaks there of running according to the rules so as not to be disqualified from winning the prize.)

4. The Hard-working Farmer

“The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything” (2:6,7).

Then and now, farmers must work really hard to bring forth a harvest and gain a reward. A field left to itself produces an abundance of weeds. Ministry for a pastor or ministry staff is hard work, and being a faithful participant in the local church takes perseverance as well. A farmer requires patience while working hard. He must wait for the crops to grow as the earth is watered with rain. This is used in James 5:7 in reference to prayer and faith. When Jesus sent out His disciples, He gave them instructions, telling them not to take along goods because, *“A worker is worthy of his wages” (Matt.10:9)*. Paul chose to not receive personal support or wages during his ministry, but he reminded Timothy that as a young pastor, he should not question or hesitate receiving a share in the resources. Those in ministry sow “spiritual seed” and should receive a “material harvest” (1Cor.9:11). It is the responsibility of the believers in the local body to support their pastors and staff through faithful financial giving.

Paul was also talking about the heavenly reward that comes to those who work hard serving the Master . . .

“In the future there is reserved 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” (4:8).

The "hard-working farmer" has many images to apply to our lives: hard work, patience, faith, support, faithful giving, a future heavenly reward... Which image do you relate to? Are you faithfully supporting your hard-working ministry staff? They can't carry on their work without the faithful support of the local body.

5. The Imprisoned Criminal

“Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the Word of God is not imprisoned. For this reason, I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory” (2:8-10).

Paul was asking Timothy to remember what Jesus Christ went through, and how much Jesus wants people to enjoy that eternal salvation that He purchased for them. Paul was willing to be imprisoned as a criminal. Why? So that more and more people might enjoy the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. Paul exhorted Timothy to be willing to endure hardship if necessary, for the sake of spreading the gospel of salvation to those who still don't know about the saving love of Christ.

***“It is a trustworthy statement:
For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him;
If we endure, we shall also reign with Him;
If we deny Him, He also will deny us;
If we are faithless, He remains faithful;
for He cannot deny Himself (2:11-13).***

The first Christians did not own personal copies of the Bible, thus, creeds and confessional statements like this one, set in poetic symmetry, helped them memorize key ideas. This particular hymn or poem is more than a belief statement; *it is a commitment statement* – a commitment to endure, to be strong, to stay the course. There is great reward for staying the course strong to the end. Jesus will remain faithful to us, even if we are not faithful to Him. His promise to us is secure. Yet, if we deny Him, *He will deny us*. This can be understood in one of two ways: 1) *He will deny us certain rewards* in heaven, rewards for enduring persecution. 2) *He will deny knowing us as His children* if we deny knowing Him as our Savior (which would be evidence that the Spirit did not really lie within us – see 1John 2:19,20). Jesus also declared, “*Depart from*

Me, I never knew you” (Matt.7:21-23) referring to those who thought they “knew” Him, because they were religious. But Jesus knows our true hearts.

Paul finishes the confessional by declaring, *“If we are faithless, He remains faithful”* Why? Because the answer follows, *“for He cannot deny Himself.”* If Jesus lives in the believer by His Spirit, and the believer is unfaithful, Jesus will not deny His very Spirit that HE has made to dwell within. His faithfulness is NOT dependent or based on our faithfulness. His faithful love should deeply motivate a true believer to also want to be faithful to Him!

6. The Approved Workman

“Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless, and leads to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and thus they upset the faith of some” (2:14-18).

Paul likens Timothy to a workman who is being examined by God for the way that he handles the Word of God. The phrase *“handling accurately”* literally means *“to cut a straight path.”* Studying God’s Word requires diligent hard work- just like the hard-working farmer. It was used of Greek workers who cut a straight path through an area, or who plowed a straight furrow in a field, or of builders who laid down a straight plumbline. The word has the idea of studying and teaching the Word of God in a clear, accurate, straightforward manner so that those who are listening will clearly know what they should believe and how they should live.

The one who teaches God’s Word must first apply the truths to his or her own life. James reminded his readers that, *“Not many of you should presume to be teachers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” (James 3:1).* Paul exhorts Timothy in this section to watch his words. James exhorts his hearers (especially teachers) to watch their tongues (3:2-12).

Paul names two teachers who were NOT using Scripture accurately,

not watching their words. Hymenaeus and Philetus “*have gone astray from the truth.*” As a result, they had upset the faith of people. Their teaching did not spread spiritual health; rather, it had spread like an infection- like gangrene, harming the people.

7. The Honorable Vessel

This is the one picture that Paul gives using an inanimate object – a household vessel. He notes how there were vessels for noble purposes and others for ignoble (common) purposes.

“Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels” (2:20-23).

You notice some key words there: *cleanse, flee, refuse*. There is the clear idea of staying away from things that could pollute one’s life and dilute spiritual power. In the typical Roman home, there were special vessels and not-so-special vessels. For example, the bowls for foot-washing were the “not-so-noble” vessels. A gold goblet was a “noble” vessel. The more we pursue a pure heart and clean mouth, the more useful of a vessel we can be to Christ. Paul was placing a choice before Timothy: to choose which kind of vessel he wants to be in “God’s house.” If he pursues a “clean life” he will be a noble vessel *useful to the Master prepared for every good work*.

Paul exhorts Timothy to choose people who call on the Lord with a pure heart to spend his time with, who are also pursuing a life of righteousness, faith, love and peace. It is hard to *go it alone*. We need each other to spur one another on to follow Christ.

The word “consecration” means: To devote oneself to a special purpose through a solemn act or decision. This is an act of devotion that every child of God can take at some point. You can do this alone or, even better, with some friends and witnesses. Once you have consecrated your life to God, just remember that you will have ups and downs in your journey of living for Him. You will need to renew this commitment often, especially in those times when you have been weak, discouraged, or have lost heart.

8. The Humble Bond-servant

The last of the 8 pictures is one of Paul's favorite titles for himself: the bond-servant.

“And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will” (2:24-26).

In Roman culture, the bond-servant was one who had willingly given his life in the service of a master. Thus, the Lord's bond-servant must serve at the will of God. In this context, Paul emphasizes the teaching role of the bond-servant. He/she must never resort to heavy-handed tactics to try to “win a convert.” Gentleness and patience are called for, as we realize that people are held captive to the snare of the devil through lies, life-style, religious systems etc... God must release them from the grip of the evil one before they will heed our message. Prayer, patience and gentleness are the qualities of the bond-servant. What does it take any of us “to come to our senses...?” Often it takes A LOT- sadly. Just read the parable Jesus taught of the Prodigal Son who finally ‘came to his senses’ after he had to lose everything, and then work at a pig farm (Luke 15). Our sin nature is stubborn and often not willing to give in or give up our self-directed ‘I know best’ way of living life.

Oswald Chambers wrote a book entitled “My Utmost for His Highest.” Here is what he wrote about relinquishing our rights and becoming God's willing servants: “Has that breaking of my independence come? All the rest is religious fraud. The one point to decide is—will I give up? Will I surrender to Jesus Christ, placing no conditions whatsoever as to how the brokenness will come? The passion of Christianity comes from deliberately signing away my own rights and becoming a bondservant of Jesus Christ (Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest).

Discussion Questions

1. Think about the challenge of living for Jesus in the 1st century context where Paul, Timothy and others lived, with intense persecution and pressure. How does their faith encourage you?
2. Of the 8 pictures of the faithful servant, which ones speak to you the most in your current situation? Why?
3. Talk about the transfer of faith from one generation to the next (1:3-5). How are you trying to make that transfer to the next generation?
4. How has Paul's challenges to Timothy helped you to understand the responsibilities and difficulties of those in ministry? What can you do to be an encouragement to them?