

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## A Look at 2 Timothy: 2 Timothy 1:1-18 - Last Greetings and Encouragements

Several years ago, a man took ill whilst I was preaching at a Sunday evening Gospel service. I stopped mid-sentence and the meeting was immediately terminated so that an ambulance could be called. The man was a well-known father figure in the local Christian fellowship. The next day I visited him in hospital along with a friend of mine. My friend said to him: "Well, Norman, I've had some walk out from my preaching but none has ever been carried out!" However, it's not the drama of that Sunday evening, or even my friend's humour, that remains with me. It's the godly concern that that old believer had for us younger men as he lay there on his hospital bed. He had been a very influential Bible teacher in his day, but just then he realised that his days of service were coming to an end. He encouraged us, his sons in the faith, to carry forward the things of the Lord in the way he had previously instructed us in church meetings.

2 Timothy is the very last letter of Paul recorded in Scripture, written to show a spiritual father's tender care for his "true son in the faith". Paul wrote from a dungeon in Rome where he ended his days as an old man. Naturally speaking, he was nearing the end of his life on earth, but the Neroan persecution led him to expect martyrdom for his faith in Christ. He writes in 2 Timothy 4:6, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand". So what was Timothy to do? Give up? No! As his spiritual father had done, he was to stand and to continue his work for Christ. "But you ... fulfil [fill to the full] your ministry" (2 Timothy 4:5).

After years of training and preparation, the work of God was handed on by the Apostle Paul to Timothy with the words, "But you must continue in the things you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them..." (2 Timothy 3:14). This was no "last gasp" effort by a failing man, but a carefully executed succession plan so that the Gospel and the truth would live on! Timothy was to take it on with the charge "pass it on" from 2 Timothy 2:2 ringing in his ears "...the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." This, 2 Timothy 2:2, (the 2:2:2 formula), was exactly what my spiritual father enacted. It's a rallying call for every generation to hear and to follow so that the truth of God can be passed on like a baton. For example, I help to organise a church conference for young people and this scripture is our mission statement.

In addition to the external opposition from the world, Paul was aware that Timothy knew about the very distressing evidence of unfaithfulness in the Christian Church in Asia, Timothy's area of ministry. "This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me..." (2 Timothy 1:15). He also had to advise him "But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue..." (2 Timothy 3:13-14). It's the same for Christians today: "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come..." (2 Timothy 3:1). The call comes to us today, as it did then to Timothy, to go on despite the increasing darkness of our times, without any hope of their improvement.

There are other dimensions to this moving letter. As a pastor, Paul was very sensitive about the delicate nature, physical frailty, and timidity of his spiritual son. He also greatly longed to see him again and to have fellowship with him. In the meanwhile he reminded himself of Timothy's tears, an indication of concern for the testimony. Paul prayed constantly for him. So he wrote to encourage him. Let us be encouraged, too, as we study 2 Timothy 1 today.

2 Timothy 1 can be divided up in the following way:

- Absolute certainties: 2 Timothy 1:1;
- Appropriate greetings: 2 Timothy 1:2;
- Necessary qualities: 2 Timothy 1:3-5;
- Timely exhortation: 2 Timothy 1:6;
- Divine provisions: 2 Timothy 1:7;
- Divine power: 2 Timothy 1:8;
- Complete blessings: 2 Timothy 1:9-10;
- Paul's commission: 2 Timothy 1:11;
- Sure investments: 2 Timothy 1:12;
- An outline of sound words: 2 Timothy 1:13;

- A priceless treasure: 2 Timothy 1:14;
- Widespread defections: 2 Timothy 1:15;
- Faithful Onesiphorus: 2 Timothy 1:16-18.

### **Absolute certainties - 2 Timothy 1:1**

The best way to encourage anyone is to start with some positives. Paul bettered this by commencing his letter to Timothy with some absolute truths. His own credentials were “by the will of God” (2 Timothy 1:1), which always succeeds (see Ephesians 1:11). At Paul’s conversion, he was sent (or apostled) with the most marvellous of messages, the Gospel, here called “the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:1). Indestructible new life now, as well as in the time to come, (1 Timothy 4:8), is absolutely certain for believers because it is secure in Christ Jesus.

Known as Jesus Christ when He lived upon earth, He now has the Name ‘Christ Jesus’ because He is the man who has been raised from the dead, and He has ascended to the throne of God where He is seated in glory! The phrase “in Christ Jesus” occurs seven times in this epistle (2 Timothy 1:1, 9, 13; 2:1, 2:10; 3:12, 3:15), each time describing features of faith which cannot be altered, and which do not fail, because they are centred in Him. The prospect of Paul’s death clarifies for him the reality of Christianity, which is eternal life found only in God’s Son!

### **Appropriate greetings - 2 Timothy 1:2**

In 2 Timothy 1:2, Paul appropriately addresses his letter “To Timothy, a beloved son”. Timothy is not regarded as a disciple slavishly trying to follow his teacher but as a devoted son in the Christian family. A special bond of affection exists between them due to their mutual desire to serve Christ. “Timothy ... I have no one like-minded ... you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel” (Philippians 2:19-22). The greeting is supplemented with the benediction of the divine grace, mercy and peace, which his younger colleague will need for difficult days ahead in the work of the Lord. Grace for the many trials; mercy for the failures and shortcomings; and peace to counteract any doubts.

### **Necessary qualities - 2 Timothy 1:3-5**

In 2 Timothy 1:3-5, Paul refers to some essential features which are the foundations of true Christian living and service, and which had been seen in the natural and spiritual relationships that Timothy enjoyed. His spiritual father’s prayers for him were motivated by a pure conscience derived from his Jewish ancestors (2 Timothy 1:3). Timothy’s tears indicated a love for God (2 Timothy 1:4) and His honour, a tenderness that Paul wished to experience again. Genuine faith is identified as arising from his grandmother Lois, through his mother Eunice, and now also very much alive in Timothy himself (2 Timothy 1:5). The necessity for these qualities, “...love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith”, had already been emphasised by Paul in 1 Timothy 1:5 as crucial elements of godliness for Christians to possess in order to remain on course and not to stray.

It’s good to observe and to encourage the godly order we find in 2 Timothy 1:3-5 in our times and generations as we seek to possess, maintain and pass on the truth of God. There’s the importance of Christian family life for children. Older believers should seek to form spiritual relationships with younger people and should clearly communicate the truth to them in understandable terms. All young believers must not pretend, but personally possess sincere faith. By these means God furnishes godly men and women for the maintenance of His work.

### **Timely exhortation - 2 Timothy 1:6**

The Apostle exhorts Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:6 to build upon godliness, “Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you...” God had specially selected Timothy through a prophetic word to assist, and then to take over from, Paul. Both Paul and the elders completely identified themselves with Timothy in this respect by laying their hands on him, (see 1 Timothy 4:14). Here Paul is encouraging Timothy to exercise this “charisma” - the special authority and power from God for the task at hand. He was, and we are, to “fan its flame” and keep the fire burning despite all the obstacles and difficulties involved. These circumstances were not to affect him so as to dim the flame; rather they were to be the very opportunities for renewed effort.

### **Divine provisions - 2 Timothy 1:7**

Furthermore, Paul realises that Timothy is a sensitive person. He was physically frail and naturally timid (2 Timothy 1:6-7). Others may have concluded that Timothy was the wrong choice for such a demanding job, but Paul appreciated that God operates in unexpected ways. In addition, 2 Timothy 1:7 outlines the divine provisions for the good fight of the faith, “For God has not given us a spirit of fear [or cowardice], but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” By His Spirit, God gives His workers the ability to overcome. Here then is the resource for believers in the difficult last days of Christianity: power, not cowardice, in the energy of love, and with clear understanding or self-discipline.

**Divine power - 2 Timothy 1:8**

On the basis of these divine provisions, Paul appeals to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:8 not to desert him, as others had done, but to stand for the testimony of the Lord, and to share with him in suffering for the Gospel. This can only be achieved by the mighty power of God. Notice that Paul regards himself as a prisoner of the Lord, not a prisoner of the Roman authority. He was so true to the Gospel that he can claim it as his own in 2 Timothy 2:8-9, where he shows that it was the only charge that could be made against him, "... Jesus Christ ... was raised from the dead according to my gospel, for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained".

**Complete blessings - 2 Timothy 1:9-10**

Although the link between these partners in the Gospel was soon to be broken, it was impossible for Timothy to lose the realities of its blessings. Paul brings out these spiritual blessings in 2 Timothy 1:9-10 and encourages Timothy with some more absolute truths that are found "in Christ Jesus". These truths do not depend at all on what we have done, nor on us, but on God's election and His thoughts of grace for us from all eternity. From our standpoint, He has saved us; but from His side, He has called us to holiness. Our Saviour revealed all this when He appeared on earth and, in dying, rendered death powerless. A complete salvation, of life for our souls, and incorruptibility for our bodies, has been brought to light through the Gospel.

**Paul's commission - 2 Timothy 1:11**

To this glorious message Paul was given a three-fold service (2 Timothy 1:11). Acts records him coming as a royal herald, Paul the preacher; in Ephesians and Colossians there are outlines of his service as Paul the Apostle, sent with the final secrets of the heart of God; and other New Testament letters, especially Romans where he explains the Gospel to believers, show him as Paul the teacher.

**Sure investments - 2 Timothy 1:12**

However his heaven-sent missions were not received by this world and this led to his imprisonment. His knowledge of his Saviour and Lord, whom he had encountered on the Damascus road (Acts 9:1-19), made him unashamed of these wonderful revelations. Such absolute knowledge convinced him that he was right in entrusting everything to this One who would see him through to "that Day" when Christ will be glorified in His saints. We, too, need to have this same confidence, "...for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day" (2 Timothy 1:12), as we face a world still hostile to Christianity.

**An outline of sound words - 2 Timothy 1:13**

Although Paul faces certain death because of his beliefs, he leaves behind this beautiful treasury of Gospel truth, as something like an heirloom, for Timothy to own personally and in reality. "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 1:13). Timothy was to possess a complete outline of the great truths of the faith in a systematic way, rather like a completed sketch. I came to understand this verse when I heard a Bible teacher give a summary of each book in the New Testament in a sermon in which he used this verse as his text.

**A priceless treasure - 2 Timothy 1:14**

The deposit of Christian truth is also described as wholesome food that provides spiritual health for Christians. Found livingly "in Christ Jesus" it must be properly appropriated "in faith" towards God its source, and used "in love" towards man. Then it must be kept (or guarded) from the attacks of those who seek to change it, and preserved unaltered, undiluted, and without any additions, for subsequent generations of believers. We need the indwelling Holy Spirit to fulfil such a daunting task (2 Timothy 1:14).

My mother has a Maling ware™ teapot, which was made and painted™ by her sisters who worked in the Maling's factory. She always uses this teapot when family and friends visit for tea. The antique dealers would rather she kept it locked away in a display cabinet! Not so for mother! To her it is indeed priceless (special people made it), but it's also very useful for making tea (she really enjoys a good cuppa and after all, she says, that's why my aunts gave it to her!). The deposit of verse 14, "that good thing", is rather like mother's teapot. As a unique God-given treasure in Christ Jesus, we need carefully to guard it; but unless we draw on it, it will not be of any practical value to us in fighting the good fight, running the race, or keeping the faith (see 2 Timothy 4:7). It's not a relic, which has past its expiry date, nor can we discard it because it no longer fits the modern trends in Christendom. (Maling ware™ is a good example again - for years it was unfashionable, until someone realised its true value!).

**Widespread defections - 2 Timothy 1:15**

In 2 Timothy 1:15, Paul reminds Timothy of the conditions then prevalent in the church. Things had changed since his first letter when there had been great advancement of the Word of God at Ephesus through Paul's preaching (see Acts 19:1-19). At that time Timothy was commanded to remain in Ephesus and so maintain order in the church "...charge some that they teach no other doctrine", (1 Timothy 1:3). In the space of only a few years, there had been a full-scale departure from Paul and his doctrine - not some, but all; and not only in Ephesus, but in all Asia.

Two individuals, Phygellus and Hermogenes, are identified as leaders in this defection (2 Timothy 1:15) and other unsound people are named in later parts of the epistle (see 2 Timothy 2:17; 4:9,14). It was in that difficult situation, and against such active opposition, that Timothy was called to protect the purity and clarity of the Gospel and the faith, which is centred on Christ in heaven. Those conditions were the beginnings of the last days that Timothy is warned about in 2 Timothy 3:1, which describe the prevailing conditions of Christendom today. There is now widespread doctrinal and moral confusion and Paul's doctrine is no more popular now than it was then. God wants us to be faithful in our generation to those original truths of Christianity that have been passed on to us by faithful believers of previous times.

**Faithful Onesiphorus - 2 Timothy 1:16-18**

2 Timothy 1 closes with Paul identifying Onesiphorus (2 Timothy 1:16), a man from Ephesus, who had not followed the defecting majority. The Apostle Paul puts on record his deeds of faithfulness to show Timothy that there are others with him in the fight. A mispronunciation of his name can be made to show the contrast here: if all are against us (2 Timothy 1:15), at least One-is-for-us!! The value of this statement is that it encourages us to know that God always retains some, even if only a minority, who prove by their beliefs and by their actions to be "...those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22).

The name Onesiphorus means a 'bringer of profit'. He brought help and refreshment to Paul. Not ashamed of Paul's chains, he often sought him out in the dungeons of Rome, paying him many visits and ministering to his needs. From 2 Timothy 1:8,12 we deduce that this means that Onesiphorus was neither ashamed of the Gospel nor of his Lord. Paul gives testimony to the different ways Onesiphorus had consistently served him in Ephesus, which Timothy knew all about (2 Timothy 1:18). So Paul desired the Lord's mercy to rest upon the whole household of Onesiphorus as they faced new trials in that city. He's also sure that the mercy of the Lord will be towards this servant in "that Day", the day of assessment for all believers, when Christ appears (2 Timothy 4:1).

As we finish, it's challenging for each one of us to think of the glorious appearing of the Lord and to ponder what will be revealed about my faithfulness to the Lord and His people? Will it show me to have been a helper and an encourager of the people of God? Will I remain faithful to Christ and to the Gospel if there are times of persecution? Will I desert the Truth if the majority turn away from it? Do I treasure these truths of Christianity, possess, and guard them? Am I active in teaching others about their value and use? How am I passing them on to the next generation of believers?

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