

2 Timothy

Overview

Ferndale Baptist Church – 22/07/08
by Gareth Leaney

Background

This was Paul's **second** letter to **Timothy** (hence the title). It was probably written sometime in the mid-sixties when Paul was in prison in Rome. [There is some debate over whether the letters to Timothy were actually written by Paul, but the arguments are not particularly compelling.]

Timothy was a close friend and colleague of Paul. They had travelled extensively together, and Timothy is mentioned in many of Paul's other letters. Paul often refers particularly to the care and support he received from Timothy.

This is the last (surviving) letter written by Paul, and he apparently wrote it while awaiting the result of his trial. There is a sense of finality throughout the whole letter, and it is often referred to as Paul's "last will and testament." This makes for a letter full of emotion and urgency.

Reading 2 Timothy

As we read the letter, we have the privilege of 'over-hearing' Paul talking to a close friend and fellow pastor. But if the letter is so personal and specific, can the rest of us learn anything useful from it?

The letters to Timothy *do* have special significance to pastors and those in leadership. But the rest of us should not think this means they are irrelevant to us. Most of what Paul says is general and applies to all Christians. We should deal with those parts which seem more specific in two ways. First, we should take notice of the charges and responsibilities Paul gives to Pastor Timothy, and we should all feel responsible for helping our leaders to carry them out. This may mean the occasional caution or rebuke, but most of the time we should aim to love and help our leaders in the responsibilities they have. But we should also look at the underlying reasons Paul makes the charges to Timothy. They are based on gospel truths. Paul may be applying them to a pastor, but we should ask how they apply to our situations.

Structure:

- **Encouragement to be faithful** (1v1-2v13)
- **Advice to Timothy** (2v14-26)
- **Predictions for the Future** (3v1-9)
- **Paul's Charge to Timothy** (3v10-4v5)
- **The End is in Sight** (4v6-18)
- **Final Greetings** (4v19-22)

Encouragement to be faithful (1v1-2v13)

Paul greets Timothy in the customary way (v1). He refers to his status as an apostle, which is a result of God's grace (it is by the will of God and the gospel). This might seem odd in such a personal letter, but Paul's apostolic role is important throughout the letter. It is both a reason for Timothy to trust and listen to Paul, and also an encouragement; even though Paul is an apostle, he must go through hardship, just as Timothy has/will. He calls Timothy his "dear son" (v2) – there is a close bond between the two men, which colours the entire letter.

Paul gives thanks to God as he remembers Timothy. Their last encounter was obviously an emotional one (v4), and Paul longs to see Timothy again. But the main thing he remembers about Timothy is his "sincere faith," which was nurtured by his mother and grandmother (v5). And so he urges Timothy to "fan into flame" the gift of God within him. This is more than skills or talents – it seems to be closely linked with the Holy Spirit. Paul's personal involvement in Timothy's ministry

also shows through here – it was by the laying on of *his* hands that Timothy received his gift (v6). He urges Timothy to do this because he has not been given a spirit of timidity, but of power, love and self-discipline. Perhaps Timothy was naturally timid, and Paul is urging him to avoid it.

Timothy is not to be ashamed, either of the Lord Jesus or of Paul (v8). Rather, he is to join with Paul in suffering for the gospel *by the power of God*. Paul is a prisoner for Christ, and God is sustaining him in his suffering – the same God who saved them and called them to holiness. In the middle of talking about suffering, Paul reminds Timothy of the gospel they believe. They are not saved by merit, but by grace (v9), and this grace was given to them before time began but revealed in the Lord Jesus. Christ has destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And it is this gospel Paul (with Timothy) is serving. But it is because of the gospel that he is suffering. Some might think his message is a failure, but Paul is not ashamed – he is resting on solid truth, and he has eternity in sight (v12).

*Do we ever preach the gospel as though it is about avoiding suffering?
How do we help each other to deal with suffering and hardship? Do we comfort each other by preaching the gospel to each other?*

Having reminded Timothy of the gospel, Paul tells him to keep what he has taught him as the “pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ.” Paul wants Timothy to hold on to Biblical truth. But, crucially, this does not exclude faith and love. It is possible to be 'sound' but to have no faith or love in Christ. Timothy's task is to “guard the good deposit” - he is to guard the message he has been given. Paul is handing over responsibility for guarding the gospel to Timothy, but reassures him that the Holy Spirit will help him.

How do we guard the gospel?

Everyone in Asia had deserted Paul (v15). Perhaps they had lost confidence in Paul now he was in prison? The implication seems to be that they had failed in the charge Paul now gives to Timothy. Only the household of Onesiphorus merits praise, because he helped Paul.

Unlike those in Asia, Timothy is to “*be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus*” (2v1). And he is to follow Paul in “handing on the baton” to others who will guard the gospel. Paul then uses three related illustrations to encourage Timothy to keep going.

- The Soldier (v3-4) – he must be single-minded in following Christ.
- The Athlete (v5) – he must abide by 'the rules' – he must “run the race” in the right way.
- The Farmer (v6) – hard work will ultimately yield a reward.

In all of this, Timothy is to “remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David” (v8). This, Paul says, is his gospel – that Jesus is the messiah and he is alive. This is the gospel for which he is suffering, and for which he is in chains. But he endures his chains for the sake of those who will be saved. He then quotes what was probably a hymn, which picks up some of what he has been saying: the hope of life bought by the death of Christ; the importance of enduring; a warning against disowning Christ; and finally an encouragement that, ultimately, his faithfulness is not based on ours, but on his own unchangeable nature.

How does the gospel encourage us to keep going? What would it mean for us to live like a soldier, athlete or farmer?

Advice to Timothy (2v14-26)

As well as holding onto these truths himself, Timothy is to keep reminding them (presumably those he is responsible for) of these things (v14). The following verses give more advice about how they work out in practice, in his own life and in the lives of his church. He is to warn them against

trivial arguments, because the consequences are severe (v14). This might be a reference to false teaching which is going on, but could equally apply to Christians who waste their energy on pointless debates. Timothy is to do his best to be an “approved workman” - he must be unashamed (as mentioned in Ch1) and he must handle the word of truth correctly (v15). He is to avoid godless chatter for the sake of godliness. Godless chatter refers to the disease of false-teaching; Hymenaeus and Philetus were guilty of it, saying that the resurrection had already happened (v18). But God's truth is not at fault – it stands firm.

Do we have the right attitude to the Bible?

Just as some objects are noble and others are ignoble, so people can be one or the other. This links to v19 – wickedness is incompatible with a life lived for Christ. Instead, Paul tells Timothy to “flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace” (v22). Paul is not just concerned with Timothy's doctrine, but with his *character*. He must keep out of stupid arguments, being kind instead. In response to opposition he is to teach *gently*. It is possible to be resentful and angry in teaching those who oppose you, to force respect or to win an argument. But Timothy is to teach his opponents for *their* good, hoping that God will grant them repentance, understanding the truth and escaping the trap of the devil (v26).

How does this apply to the way we live our lives?

Predictions for the Future (3v1-9)

Paul has stern warnings about the future – “there will be terrible times in the last days” (3v1). People will display a whole host of ungodly attitudes. In some ways, this refers to the world's population in general. But this is not a warning against associating with non-Christians. He is still referring to the false teachers, “having a form of godliness” (v5) but without any substance underneath. Paul commands Timothy to have nothing to do with them.

He continues with a further description of these false teachers. They take advantage of vulnerable people who are struggling with sin and evil desires themselves. They want to know the truth, but never find it – the false teachers are no help. He refers to the Jannes and Jambres as an illustration. Although they are not mentioned by name, he is referring to Pharaoh's magicians in Exodus 7v11. They performed counterfeit miracles to oppose Moses. In opposing Moses, they were opposing the truth. But, eventually, the limits of their power (and their false gods) were obvious – the same will happen to these false teachers (v9).

Can we see this happening in the church today?

Paul's Charge to Timothy (3v10-4v5)

Paul contrasts his own ministry with that of the false teachers. Timothy knew Paul well, so he has no need to explain the differences – everything about his life and ministry shows that he is an approved workman, even his sufferings (v11). In fact, his suffering is evidence of his calling and his godliness – persecution will happen to anyone who lives for Christ, while evil men seem to be fine. With this in mind, Paul instructs Timothy to keep hold of what he has learned; those who taught him (his family, Paul himself) are trustworthy, as is the place of Scripture own life. Paul reminds Timothy that Scripture makes us wise for salvation through faith in Christ. And he emphasises the authority and value of Scripture – it is breathed out by God, and is “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (i.e. it is useful in avoiding the perils of the false teachers).

How should the nature of Scripture affect the way we live? Does it?

In view of this, Paul gives a charge to Timothy in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus – he could not put it more strongly! Paul tells Timothy: “Preach the Word” (4v2). The Greek word (*kerusson*) means 'herald' or 'proclaim' (the same basic word Paul uses to describe himself in 1v11). Paul has emphasised the importance of Scripture and the correct handling of it, but this is more than merely 'teaching' or 'explaining' the Bible. *Declare the Word publicly!* Paul does not want Timothy to teach the Bible as boring academic material, but as the message of salvation, as good news. And he is to be ready to do so at all times, correcting, rebuking and encouraging with great patience and care. The situation makes this all the more crucial. The time will come when people will ignore sound doctrine (v3). Instead, they will go and find teachers who will be willing to tell them what they want to hear. They will abandon the truth and turn to myths, because they don't like the truth. Again, this is not the fault of the message, but of the hearers. But, in spite of this, Timothy is to keep his head, endure hardship, do evangelism and discharge all the other duties of his ministry.

*What part does preaching have the right status in the life of our church?
Has this 'time' already come?*

The End is in Sight (4v6-18)

The letter becomes even more personal as Paul begins to draw to a close. As he is urging Timothy on in his ministry, Paul knows his own ministry is coming to an end. He compares himself to a drink offering – he has given everything he has to the work of the gospel, and now he can say “the time has come for my departure” (v6). Where he once used images like a battle and a race to urge others to keep on with their Christian lives, now he uses them to describe the end of his. But he feels he has finished well. He has survived the battle, won the race, and now he will claim his prize, the crown of righteousness (just as all believers will one day) (v8).

Just before the end, he longs for a visit from Timothy. Paul has been left all but alone – only Luke is with him (v11). He asks Timothy to bring Mark, as well as some of his belongings. He gives a warning about “Alexander the metalworker” - Paul is confident that God will deal with him, but he warns Timothy to be on his guard too. He then recounts some of the details of his trial, where he was deserted. But even in this situation, he was sustained by God and was able to preach the gospel, and he was delivered. Presumably with his trial in mind, Paul is confident that God will rescue him from every attack and will bring him safely home (Paul won't see death as a failure on God's part, but as the ultimate rescue).

Does Paul's attitude as the end draws near challenge the way we view our own lives (and deaths)?

Final Greetings (4v19-22)

Paul finishes by greeting his friends Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus (1v16). He updates Timothy on some others. He passes on greetings, and a plea that Timothy should try to arrive by winter.

In the context of the letter, his closing words seem pretty final. He leaves Timothy with the prayer that he would know the Spirit with him and God's grace, which has been running through the whole letter.