

# 2 Timothy 1

## *Guard the Gospel*

Paul had been released from house arrest in Rome sometime before the Great Fire of Rome (AD 64). He was re-arrested, probably in the summer of AD 66, possibly at Troas. He was put in a dungeon underground (2 Tim. 2:9). He was acquitted of a charge whose penalty was to be thrown to the lions (2 Tim 4:16-17), but other capital charges were pressed. He was lonely, cold, and lacked reading material (2 Tim. 4:9,13). Tradition states that Paul was condemned by the Roman senate on a charge of treason, and executed on 29 June AD 67. As a Roman citizen, Paul was beheaded at dawn (stripped to the waist, bound to a pillar in a kneeling position with his head bowed).

False teaching was fomenting in the Church in Asia Minor (2 Tim. 1:15). "Christianity...trembled, *humanly speaking*, on the verge of annihilation." Paul felt the urgency of re-commissioning Timothy to (1) guard, (2) suffer for, (3) continue in and (4) proclaim the gospel. The teaching about the kingdom of heaven (the gospel) is a treasure worth storing up and sharing out (Matt. 13:51-52).

### 1. What is the gospel?

#### (a) The message that God saved us (1:9a)

"...God, who saved us..." (1:8-9).

The same basic word is used occasionally for the healing miracles of Jesus, e.g. it is used for the healing of the woman with the issue of blood (Matthew 9:20-22). Salvation aims at the recovery of whole people, not just the salvation of "souls".

#### (b) The message that God called us to holiness (1:9a)

"...God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling..." (1:8-9).

Salvation isn't just "come to Jesus and have your sins forgiven." If we have Jesus as Saviour then we also have him as Lord, and he commands the way of the new life he gives us (1 Thess. 4:3).

#### (c) The message that God is preparing us for immortality (1:10)

"...our Saviour Christ Jesus, who...brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (1:10).

The whole person salvation God has accomplished for us in his Son aims higher than this world – the goal is our participation in the new heavens and new earth.

Notice that this pattern us the same as the Exodus redemption: salvation from slavery – law giving at Sinai – entrance into the Promised Land.

The gospel is an message about the renovation of the whole cosmos. Why is it such unwelcome news to lost people?

## 2. Where is the gospel from?

The gospel is definitively not of human origin. God “called us...not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began” (1:9).

- The initiative in calling belongs to God. The gospel is a word “from outside”. It is not the result of a religious impulse in the human heart.
- The motivation in calling was God’s grace, not our works. Works are about merit. Grace is always unmerited – indeed, grace is God’s kindness, favour and mercy shown to people who are by nature and action his enemies.
- The source of the call was the purpose of God which he determined before the ages began. There is nothing capricious about the call of God – it partakes of his character: faithful, righteous and gracious.

## 3. What does the gospel rest on?

The gospel rests on the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. God’s purpose of grace (the gospel) has now “been manifested through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (1:10).

### (a) Christ appeared

The incarnation of the Son of God is essential to the gospel. It was no mere man who “entered the lists” on our behalf. Indeed, no mere man was strong enough. It needed the God-Man. But he did this through weakness (Phil. 2:6-8; Heb. 5:7-8)

### (b) Christ abolished death

Death is the consequence of sin (Gen. 2:17). Death is an intruder on God’s good creation, and the Bible is the story of how God removed it. The word “abolished” means “to render powerless”. Clearly, we still die. But Christ has “destroyed [same verb, i.e. rendered powerless] the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and delivered all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Heb. 2:14-15).

Death remains “the last enemy” (1 Cor. 15:26; Rev. 20:14).

### (c) Christ brought life and immortality to light

Another way to read Scripture is to see in it the story of how God restores life to his creation. In Genesis 2:9 we read first about the tree of life; and in Revelation 22:1-2 we are told about the tree of life and river of the water of life. The story about life brackets the story about death!

In the Old Testament the story of life was present, but the light was dim. The full light comes only in the New Testament with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the fullness of revelation and the brightness of God’s glory (Heb. 1:1-3).

Paul's great concern was the gospel. In v. 12 he calls it "the thing entrusted by Christ to my care". Paul urgently desires that the gospel will be preserved in the world to the very end of history, and he is confident that Christ has the power to do this very thing.

But Paul realizes that he cannot sit back idly and do nothing to preserve the gospel. The gospel was under threat, as Paul reveals in vv. 8 and 15-18:

- First, Paul (the herald, apostle and teacher of the gospel) was suffering as a prisoner in Rome, awaiting execution. Who would continue to herald and teach the gospel after his death?
- Secondly, Paul was sorrowful because there had been a major defection from the gospel in Asia. Who would hold fast to the gospel at a time of downgrade?

This is the context in which Paul commands Timothy to guard the gospel.

#### 4. Communicating the gospel (v. 11)

Paul identifies himself as "a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher" of the gospel. These are roles to which he was "appointed". Paul was keenly aware that Christ had appointed him when he had appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus.

"Preacher, apostle and teacher" aren't roles anyone can take for himself. But, these titles do tell us something important about communicating the gospel.

##### (a) A preacher proclaims

The word "preacher" is related to the word for "proclamation". So the task of preaching is the task of the "herald" of the King.

The herald proclaims the message delivered to him. He does not invent his message; he does not tinker with his message; he simply delivers his message.

The herald proclaims his message with all the authority of the One who sent him.

How carefully, therefore, the preacher must prepare himself to preach!

- He must be sure that what he is saying is what he has been commissioned to say. He mustn't dilute the gospel, and he mustn't adulterate the gospel.
- He must speak authoritatively because he represents the King; but he must be careful that he does not assume any personal authority to make his proclamation.

How carefully we must listen to preaching. To be sure, preachers are only men – earthen vessels – prone to weak understanding and weak presentation of the gospel. But if we despise them and therefore despise their proclamation of the gospel, we are guilty of despising the King whose message they proclaim.

##### (b) An apostle is sent

The word "apostle" emphasises that the messenger has been sent. He has a commission from his Master, and woe betide him if he fails to fulfil it. Hence Paul's awareness of the urgency of his commission.

There have been no apostles in the sense that Paul was an apostle since the death of John, the last of the eyewitnesses of the risen Christ.

Having said that, the gospel itself is “apostolic” – it has been sent by God the Father into the world:

- first and foremost by the sending of the incarnate Son (e.g. John 3:17; 4:34; 5:23-24, 36; 6:29, 38-39; 10:36; 11:42; 17:3); Jesus was sent by God into the world with a mission;
- then by the Son’s sending of his apostles (and those who would follow them) into the world, e.g. John 9:4; 13:20; 17:18; 20:21;
- and also by the sending of the Holy Spirit who empowers and authenticates the message (John 14:17,26; 15:26; 1 Peter 1:12).

So the gospel is from God the Father, through God the Son, by God the Holy Spirit. Its communication must be (i) accompanied by the power of the Spirit, (ii) speak of God the Son, and (iii) lead back to God the Father.

The sense of the gospel as a “divinely sent communication” mustn’t be lost.

(c) *A teacher instructs*

If the title “apostle” emphasises the “going”, and the title “preacher” emphasises the “arriving and proclaiming”, then the title “teacher” emphasises the “staying and instructing” – a teacher abides in one place and works to raise the understanding of his pupils.

It is true that Paul moved around – but look at his letters! His letters demonstrate that Paul remained in close contact with the churches he founded and continued to instruct the converts in the applications of the gospel.

The teaching ministry is one of the gifts Christ gives to the church (Eph. 4:11).

Why is the teaching ministry necessary? Because:

- this is how the people of God are equipped for their ministries in the church (Eph. 4:12);
- this is how we are brought to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God (Eph. 4:13);
- this is how we are made mature and stable – able to discern and resist the false teachings of the world (Eph. 4:14);
- this is how the church is helped to grow up into Christ (Eph. 4:15-16);
- the message of the Bible is exceptionally rich and it is the work of a lifetime to apply it to the contemporary lives of the people of God.

## 5. Suffering for the gospel (v. 12a)

When Paul calls Timothy to be willing to suffer for the sake of the gospel (v. 8) he is calling him to something he himself was willing to do (v. 12a).

But the gospel is the news that God has saved us, called us to holiness and is preparing us for immortality (the life of the new creation). That is good news indeed! Why does it entail any suffering at all?

### (a) Suffering for the gospel is unavoidable (2 Tim. 3:12)

Suffering for the gospel is unavoidable because the gospel is a total contradiction of everything the world-in-rebellion stands for. The gospel is the news that God (who never at any time relinquished control of his creation) has now established his control through the life, death and resurrection of his incarnate Son.

But just a few hours before his arrest, Jesus said, “Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me” (John 15:20-21).

Suffering is unavoidable simply because the world-in-rebellion hates Christ. The world-in-rebellion therefore also hates anyone who aligns himself with Christ.

### (b) Suffering for the gospel is necessary (2 Tim. 2:3)

Moreover, suffering because we publicly acknowledge Jesus Christ is necessary. Jesus said, “Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven...And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:32-33,38).

A disciple who for fear of suffering for the gospel will not confess publicly that Jesus Christ is Lord is a contradiction in terms.

### (c) Suffering for the gospel is service (2 Tim. 1:12a)

Suffering for the gospel is also service. This was the “mind that was in Christ Jesus” – he “took the form of a servant”; he “became obedient to death on the cross” (Phil. 2:5-8). And his people follow his example.

So when Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus, he showed “him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” (Acts 9:16). And when Paul wrote to the church at Colossae he revealed that he rejoiced “in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (Col. 1:24).

### (d) Suffering for the gospel is not shame (2 Tim. 1:8,12)

Suffering normally entails some form of shame (pain or sense of loss of status), e.g. the shame of loss and disappointed hopes; the shame of realized weakness; the public shame of being held up as a failure.

But Paul brackets vv. 8-12a by talking about suffering without shame: "...do not be ashamed...but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God" (v. 8); "[my appointment as a preacher, apostle and teacher of the gospel] is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed..." (v. 12).

How is this possible? The gospel gives us the bigger perspective of the purpose of God – gospel suffering always leads to gospel glory. Christ is the pattern (1 Peter 1:11) that we follow (Rom. 8:18f; 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 1:6-9).

## 6. Guarding the gospel (v. 12b-14)

The word translated "keep" in vv. 12b and 14 really means "to guard" – it is the word used of a prison guard. Paul was convinced that Christ has power to take the greatest care of the gospel (v. 12b); and when he charges Timothy to do the same, he encourages him that the same keeping power is available to us by "the Holy Spirit who dwells in us" (v. 14). We are not on our own – praise the Lord!

But why does the gospel need to be guarded?

### (a) Guard the gospel because it is threatened by downgrade

The gospel was threatened by downgrade (v. 15; 2:16-18). This takes so many forms (e.g. liberalism, syncretism, sacerdotalism) – but it often comes down to the desire for control, money, or acclaim.

### (b) Guard the gospel because it is "the standard of the truth"

The gospel is "the pattern of sound words" Timothy had heard from Paul (v. 13). The word "pattern" can mean "a standard or model". "Sound words" is literally "healthy words", which contrasts with the gangrenous babblings of the false teachers (2:16-17).

Paul modelled the teaching of the gospel – he laid out its floor plan – and Timothy must not stray from these life-giving words.

Moreover, Timothy must "hold onto" the "model of sound teaching" in his own life. He must be a living model of "the faith and love which are in Christ" (v. 13). It is by living out the gospel that he holds onto the gospel. Rigid orthodoxy is not enough. If our lives lack confidence in Christ and love for people, we contradict the gospel.

### (c) Guard the gospel because it is "the good deposit"

The word "good" can mean "attractive, beautiful, pleasing to God." That is what the gospel is – the most precious thing we have. It is:

- the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16-17);
- the unsearchable wisdom of God (1 Cor. 2:6-13);
- a treasure of undimmed glory (2 Cor. 3:11; 4:6);
- the message of reconciliation (Eph. 3:6);
- the proclamation of the richness of God's grace (Eph. 3:8).

## 2 Timothy 2

### *Suffer for the Gospel*

Paul's concern is for the propagation of the gospel. He has passed it on to Timothy, and he instructs Timothy to pass it on to faithful men who will themselves be able to pass it on to others (v. 2) – that covers four generations.

But Paul recognizes that the gospel cannot be propagated without suffering. Already in chapter 1 he has used the language of fear, shame and suffering.

Now, in chapter 2 the theme of suffering comes to the fore and Paul exhorts Timothy, “Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (v. 1). Paul uses six pictures to help Timothy see what sort of suffering is necessary for the gospel. Central to all of this is the manner in which sufferings of Christ are the pattern for the sufferings of his people (vv. 8-14).

The inevitability of suffering for the gospel may seem foreign to us – it is undoubtedly the experience of Christians in other countries – but what has it to do with us? Two brief answers before we come to the study. First, suffering for the gospel may come even in Northern Ireland – think of the public disgrace which is heaped on people who dare to speak against the new morality. Secondly, even when that form of suffering is absent, faithful discipleship does involve the six types of suffering of which Paul writes in this chapter.

Paul recognizes that this isn't obvious. But he promises that we will comprehend it if we think about what he writes and the Lord gives us understanding (v. 7).

### **1. Endure suffering like a good soldier (vv. 3-4)**

Paul focuses attention on the two primary characteristics of the soldier – the good soldier (a) endures, because (b) his eyes are set on his commanding officer. These two characteristics belong together. No soldier simply goes into warfare in order to suffer – he goes to the battlefield and he stays there because his will has been captured by the will of his commander.

So Paul does not just say, “Be strong... Endure hardship as a good soldier.” He says, “Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus... Endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”

(a) A willingness to suffer with Christ (v. 3)

Soldiers are not caught off-guard by hardship – it is what they expect – it is what they are trained for – they may complain, but they do not mutiny.

The Greek manuscripts differ in the opening words of v. 3. Some say, “Share in suffering” rather than just “suffer”. Paul suffered, and he wanted Timothy to share in suffering – but share with whom? With Paul (1:8), and with Christ (Phil. 3:10).

When we become Christians (literally, followers of Christ), we take the southward journey with him to Jerusalem, rejection and death. It is necessary for us to count the cost at the outset – to adopt the right mindset.

(b) *A willingness to be mastered by Christ* (v. 4)

A true commander masters his soldiers by dint of his character – his own endurance, his love for his men, and his success in battle. In turn, his troops love and obey him – they willingly follow him over the top – they will die for him.

The Christian is mastered by Christ – his love, his cross, his victory. And so the Christian's focus is on Christ and his will – “What does my Lord want me to do?”

Especially, the pastor-teacher avoids “entanglements” that would hinder him for fulfilling his calling to preach and teach the Word. Such “entanglements” may be legitimate in themselves, e.g. a part-time job, a sport, a club – for each man this will be different. The defining characteristic is that the entanglement distracts the man from his service to his Lord.

## **2. Run like a rule-keeping athlete (v. 5)**

Elsewhere Paul uses athletic imagery to describe his own willingness suffering for the gospel (1 Cor. 9:26-27). Here he calls Timothy to join him in such suffering.

Every sport has its rules – always for the contest itself, but also for the training. The world of athletics has been shaken by various doping scandals. Gold medallists have been stripped of their titles after their cheating has been detected.

The Christian is under obligation to live “lawfully” – to keep God's moral law. Paul wanted Timothy to engage in a struggle with false teachers for the sake of the gospel. But Paul was absolutely clear that Timothy must engage in this struggle “according to the rules” – he must love God with heart, soul and mind, and he must love his neighbour (his opponents!) as himself – see 2:24-26. If Timothy failed in either of these, then any “victory” would actually be defeat.

## **3. Toil like a hard-working farmer (v. 6)**

The farmer's life and work are “totally devoid of excitement, remote from all glamour of peril [unlike the soldier] and of applause [unlike the athlete]” (Moule).

The word Paul uses to describe the farmer emphasises the laboriousness of his work – it means “to become weary or tired, to work hard, to toil, to strive, to struggle.” But for that very reason the farmer's toil is praiseworthy, and he earns his right to partake of the crops.

Paul was no stranger to this (as Timothy knew very well, 3:10-11). In 2 Cor. 11-12 he describes some of his labours for the sake of the church.

What sort of harvest was Paul thinking about? The New Testament consistently presents two types of fruit – the fruit of conversion and the fruit of transformation.

(a) *The harvest of converts* Jesus said, “I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide” (John 15:16).

(b) *The harvest of holiness* The fruit of the Spirit is a life transformed through diligent walking in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-25). “Whatever one sows, that will he also reap” (Gal. 6:7).



#### 4. The crown always follows the cross (v. 8-13)

The three metaphors in vv. 3-6 illustrate the fact that people will suffer hardship for something good: the soldier endures because he wants the commander's commendation (v. 4); the athlete competes according to the rules because he wants the laurel (v. 5); the farmer toils diligently to partake of the crop (v. 6).

Paul now drives home his point from the experience of Christ (v. 8), of Paul (vv. 9-10), and of Christian believers (vv. 11-13). The effect of this is to impress Timothy with the inevitability, the pattern and the necessity of suffering for the gospel.

##### (a) The experience of Christ (v. 8)

"Remember Jesus Christ" – the command "remember" is in the present tense, i.e. "keep on remembering". We are inclined to forget because we allow ourselves to be distracted by "quarrels about words" (v. 14), or the "love of self" (3:2-4) or (particularly in the context of this chapter) the fear of suffering (1:8).

Paul says that in the gospel he proclaims two central truths about Christ, both of which involve suffering and subsequent glory:

- Christ was "raised from the dead." Christ suffered the accursed death of the cross – but God raised him from the dead ("raised" is a *divine* passive).

The resurrection was more than a return to the old life. Jesus was raised as "firstborn" from the dead (Col. 1:18). His life is the life of the age to come.

"Raised" is a perfect, which indicates the permanence of the resurrection – "having been raised from the dead he can never suffer again."

- Christ is "of the seed of David" – the Son of God became the Son of Man by the incarnation; his humiliation was like David's humiliation (his years of fleeing from Saul), and his exaltation is like David's exaltation (enthroned over the whole people of God, with the nations paying tribute).

So when God raised Jesus, he seated him at his right hand (far above all rule, authority, power and dominion, and above every other name), and put everything under his feet, making him head over all things (Eph. 1:20-22).

The effect of this summary of the gospel is to emphasise:

- the necessity of the sequence of humiliation followed by exaltation;
- the degree of both humiliation and exaltation;
- the permanence of the exaltation.

This is what we believe – that our salvation is based on the life, death and resurrection of the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

Paul's point is to use the gospel to put backbone into Timothy. "So then, Timothy,' the apostle seems to be saying, 'when you are tempted to avoid pain, humiliation, suffering or death in your ministry, remember Jesus Christ and think again!'" (Stott, p. 62).

(b) *The experience of Paul* (vv. 9-10)

Paul points to his own experience – he was suffering for the gospel as though he were a common criminal and not a Roman citizen and an innocent man.

Chains were not a new experience for Paul. After Paul's conversion, Jesus said, "I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name" (Acts 9:16).

During his (first) house arrest in Rome Paul used his chains to "serve to advance the gospel", so that the imperial guard and others in the imperial household were evangelized (Phil. 1:12-13). Now Paul was chained in a Roman dungeon, but "God's word is not chained" – Paul used his defence before the emperor to preach the gospel fully (4:16-17).

That, indeed, is why Paul was willing to suffer. Paul wanted the elect to "obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" – but they could only obtain salvation if they believed the gospel message – but they could only believe if they heard (Rom. 10:14,17) – but the gospel messenger necessarily suffers. So Paul must "endure all things for the sake of the elect" (see also Col. 1:24-25).

(c) *The experience of Christian believer* (vv. 11-13)

It is the necessity of suffering to which Paul now moves. He quotes two pairs of pithy proverbs about the Christian life and experience. These sayings are "trustworthy" – we are to receive their direction and warning. The first pair of sayings concerns those who are true and who endure; and the second pair is about those who are false and faithless.

- "If we died with him, we shall also live with him. If we endure, we shall also reign with him."

"Dying with Christ" is parallel to "enduring". So "dying" (in this passage) means "our death to self and to safety, as we take up the cross and follow Christ" (Stott, p. 63). This is the path of discipleship. Jesus received the crown only by way of the cross – and we receive eternal life only by the way of discipleship.

There can be no crown without the cross – so be realistic about your calling!

The crown always follows the cross – so be encouraged about your calling!

- "If we deny him, he also will deny us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful; he cannot deny himself."

"If we deny him..." sounds like the words of Jesus: "Whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 10:33).

"He will deny us" is parallel to "he remains faithful". "Faithfulness on his part means carrying out his threats...as well as his promises" (Hendricksen).

"God remains for ever himself, the same God of mercy and justice, fulfilling his promises (whether of blessing or of judgment), giving us life if we die with Christ and a kingdom if we endure, but denying us if we deny him, just as he warned, because he cannot deny himself" (Stott, p. 65).

Paul now uses three more pictures to help Timothy see what is required of him if he is to propagate the gospel (v. 2).

The teaching in this section is set firmly in the context of the relationships Timothy has with other men in the church. These relationships were tense because some of the men wanted to be teachers, but they were not teaching the gospel, and this was leading to quarrels. So Paul instructs Timothy (a) to charge the men to stop quarrelling over words (v. 14), and (b) to avoid entering into quarrels himself (vv. 22-23). This would be tremendously difficult – so the three pictures Paul uses emphasise the frame of mind that Timothy must adopt if he is to fulfil his calling.

The teaching in this portion has primary application to ministers of the Word. But it also speaks to all Christians – if we want to be useful, fruitful members of the church we must heed the teaching Paul delivers here.

## **5. Be diligent like an approved workman (vv. 14-19)**

Paul makes a contrast between what is expected to Timothy and the observed behaviour of the false teachers.

Timothy must present himself to God as an approved workman who handles the word of truth correctly. “Right handling” literally means “to cut straight”. The same word is used in the Greek translation of Prov. 3:6, “In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will *make straight* your paths.” The picture is of cutting a road straight and level so that travellers may go directly to their destination.

So the faithful minister of the Word must be accurate in his interpretation of Scripture and plain in his application. If he does this he will help his congregation to go straight and unimpeded on the path of discipleship.

But the false teachers “swerve from the truth” (v. 18). The Greek word translated “swerve” means “to miss a target”. The truth is the target, and they consistently miss it because their eye has been distracted by the quarrel over words.

The result of false teaching is appalling – it produces ungodliness that spreads like gangrene (vv. 16-17). It was unsettling the faith of people.

Paul identifies the false teaching in Ephesus – some men were saying that “the resurrection has already happened” (v. 18). It is very possible that this teaching was caused by trying to shoehorn the gospel into the mould of Greek philosophy. Something similar happens whenever men accommodate the gospel to any form of humanist thinking, e.g.

- Genesis is accommodated to Big Bang cosmology and evolutionism;
- the Gospel is accommodated to a political ideology such as socialism to produce a “social gospel” or a “liberation theology”;
- the Gospel is accommodated to modernism to produce “liberal theology”;
- the Gospel is accommodated to existentialism to produce “neo-orthodoxy”.

It is easy to “follow the herd”. But the “approved workman” will “take pains” and “make every effort” to “cut the path of Scripture straight”.

## 6. Purge yourself like a clean vessel (vv. 20-22)

Knowledge of the truth is really only possible when our hearts are pure. So Paul urges Timothy to purge his life of every vice. He compares ministers of the Word to the vessels or dishes in a great house. The master of the house will only want to use the vessels that are clean.

The vessels Paul is thinking of are teachers of the Word (cf. Acts 9:15; 2 Cor. 4:7). If a teacher is careful to keep himself “clean” he will be:

- “set apart as holy”;
- “useful to the master”;
- “ready for every good work”.

Paul indicates how this can be achieved:

(a) We must flee (youthful) passions (v. 22a). We must give no quarter to self-assertion, self-indulgence, selfish ambition, obstinacy and arrogance.

(b) We must have nothing to do with “foolish, ignorant controversies” (v. 23), i.e. quarrels about matters outside the teaching of Scripture.

(c) We must “pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart”, i.e. we must actively and eagerly seek fellowship with virtue and with virtuous people.

## 7. Be meek because you are the Lord’s servant (vv. 23-26)

Paul had previously warned Timothy that “an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words” produces “envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction” (1 Tim. 6:4-5), i.e. it disrupts relationships.

In contrast Timothy must remember that he is the slave of the Lord. As such he is to adopt a very different attitude towards people:

- he must be kind to everyone – mild as a nurse with children (1 Thess. 2:7);
- he must be able to teach – having the aptitude to teach truth and correct error;
- he must patiently endure evil – forbear people’s unkindnesses, be patient with their foolishness, be tolerant of their eccentricities;
- he must correct his opponents with gentleness – show humility and courtesy; the opposite of the brash rudeness of his opponents.

“Truth matters, but so does our attitude. We have to live and speak and interact with others in a spirit of humility...[Paul knew that he] was about to die. He saw false teachers working to destroy the church. He had been betrayed and abandoned. You would expect him to say, ‘Nuke the heretics, and don’t worry about civilian casualties!’ But he didn’t. Instead he said, in effect, ‘Don’t be a jerk.’...Paul had been shown grace by the Lord. So he did the same towards others, even opponents. He genuinely cared about people who disagreed with him. Even when he fiercely opposed them, he didn’t just want to beat them in an argument; he wanted to win them to the truth” (Josh Harris, *Humble Orthodoxy*).

## 2 Timothy 3

### *Continue in the Gospel*

Paul is in a Roman dungeon awaiting his final trial and execution. But his mind is on the future of the gospel rather than his own future. The defection from the gospel in Asia Minor distresses him, and he is anxious about Timothy who is gentle and timid. So in this chapter Paul “begins with a vivid sketch of the contemporary scene, and against this background summons Timothy – in spite of the almost universal declension from God and in spite of his own temperamental infirmity – to continue faithful to what he has learned” (John Stott).

#### 1. **The men who depart from the Scriptures (vv. 1-9)**

##### (a) *The time in which the men who depart from the Scriptures appear* (v. 1)

Paul begins this section with an emphatic “know this!” He is underscoring the fact that opposition to the gospel is not a passing situation. “The last days” are the present, not the future – everything between the exaltation of Christ and his coming again in glory (c.f. Acts 2:14-17 and Heb. 1:1-2). Calvin comments, “Under *the last days* he includes the universal condition of the Christian Church.”

The “last days” are times of “stress”. The word translated “perilous” was used in classical Greek of dangerous wild animals and the raging of the sea. Matt. 8:28 uses it of the demoniacs who lived among the tombs. The word came to mean “difficult” or “hard to bear”.

The cause of the peril of these last days is the men who will arise. It is this that Paul wants to bring to our attention with his emphatic “know this!”

##### (b) *The character of the men who depart from the Scriptures* (vv. 2-4)

Paul uses 19 adjectives to describe the men who arise in the last days.

His description of them opens and closes with four words each built out of the Greek word for love (*phil-*). They will be “lovers of self, lovers of money...lovers of pleasure, rather than lovers of God.” What is fundamentally wrong with these men is that their love is dysfunctional and misdirected.

Within these brackets, Paul speaks of how the misdirected love of these men has destroyed their ability to form good human relationships.

- “boasters, proud, blasphemers” – this group of three adjectives describes men who are so pleased with themselves that they despise everyone else.
- “disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving” – these five terms apply to family life. The word “unholy” was used to refer to a lack of filial respect. “Unloving” employs the Greek word for ordinary human affection – these men are “inhuman” in their lack of natural affections. “Unforgiving” means “irreconcilable”, i.e. unwilling even to talk to ones parents.
- “slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty” – they lack restraint, loyalty, prudence and humility – these men are incapable of good relationships.

“God’s order, as plainly declared in his moral law, is that we love him first..., our neighbour next and our self last. If we reverse the order of the first and third..., our neighbour in the middle is bound to suffer. So the root of the trouble in ‘times of stress’ is that men are ‘utterly self-centred’” (John Stott).

(c) *The religion of the men who depart from the Scriptures* (v. 5)

Shocking as it may seem these men are nevertheless religious: they have “a form of godliness”. They attend church and go through the forms of worship. But they are devoid of the power of religion: there is no “power and love and self-control” (1:7); no “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17); no putting to death of what is earthly and putting on of the new self (Col. 3:5, 10).

Remember that Paul is describing men who are trying to exercise control in the church as teachers and rulers. But their influence is deadly (2:16-17) – they are a contaminant in the life of the church. Timothy must have nothing to do with them.

(d) *The proselytizing zeal of the men who depart from the Scriptures* (vv. 6-7)

Paul now describes how the contamination spreads. These men “creep into households and make captives of gullible women”. “Their method was not direct and open, but furtive, secretive, cunning” (John Stott). This was the method of the serpent in Eden, and it is still the method of the cults.

Paul says two things about the people who are easily gulled:

- they are morally weak – “loaded down with sins” – they have not found in Jesus Christ deliverance from sin as a burden and sin as a driver;
- they are intellectually naïve – “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” – they do not apply themselves to understanding the gospel, but are more interested in religious novelty.

Such people “are an easy prey for the door-to-door religious salesman” (Stott).

(e) *The failure of the men who depart from the Scriptures* (vv. 8-9)

We can be vexed by the false teachers who insinuate themselves into the church, opposing the truth and troubling the faith of some. But Paul compares these men to the Egyptian court magicians in the days of the Exodus. These men (Jewish tradition called them Jannes and Jambres) opposed Moses – and in the same way the false teachers oppose the apostolic gospel.

But the court magicians were exposed as failures. Their staffs were swallowed by Aaron’s staff (in the form of serpents); their ability to counterfeit Moses’ signs was very limited; they could not resist the LORD; and they served Egypt’s destruction.

In the same way, the false teachers will not get very far, and their folly will be exposed for all to see. Their minds are corrupt (they cannot think straight) and they are disapproved (tested and found wanting, by God) with respect to the faith.

False teaching comes and goes, but the gospel remains. “For there is something patently spurious about heresy, and something self-evidently true about the truth” (Stott).

## 2. The men who abide in the Scriptures (vv. 10-15)

In this passage Paul twice addresses Timothy by saying “but you” (vv. 10, 14). He is making a strong contrast between Timothy and the men described in vv. 1-9. Paul *is* different, and Timothy *is and is to continue being* different from them!

In particular, Timothy is to be different in his relationship to the Scriptures. The men of vv. 1-9 have become disconnected from the truth – they resist it (v. 8); they deceive other people with respect to it (vv. 6-7, 13); and they are deceived by their own deceptions (v. 13). Not so Timothy! Timothy is to continue in the Scriptures (v. 14) – he is to preach the Word (4:2).

In fact, Paul seems deliberately to be turning Timothy’s attention away from Paul himself and towards the Scriptures. Paul will not live much longer (4:6-8) – Timothy cannot expect to continue enjoying Paul’s apostolic company. But he can and he must enjoy the company of the Holy Scriptures – the Scriptures are competent to equip Timothy fully for his calling (vv. 16-17).

(a) *Paul’s example to Timothy: “You have followed me carefully”* (vv. 10-13)

“You have carefully followed” (v. 10) – the Greek can mean “to walk in the footsteps of someone”. This suggests the commitment of a disciple. So Timothy is not merely a detached student of Paul, but a dedicated follower. We must remember that the Faith is more than a set of doctrines that requires mental understanding and agreement – the Faith is about a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ that requires a reorientation of heart and life. Jesus was never shy of calling men to costly discipleship: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt. 16:24).

So what has Timothy followed so carefully that it has altered the course of his life?

- *Paul’s doctrine, manner of life, purpose* These three words might be paraphrased “compass, path and goal”. Paul’s doctrine is the apostolic gospel, and it is that which set the direction for Paul’s life – indeed of all believers! “Life” is really “way of life” or “demeanour”; and “purpose” suggests “resolve”. So the way Paul thinks (his doctrine) determines the way he behaves (his way of life) and the tenacity with which he holds to his goal (his purpose).
- *Paul’s faith, longsuffering, love* We can understand these words in the context of Paul’s relationships with people in the church. “Longsuffering” is necessary when dealing with people who are awkward and tiresome – Paul had commanded Timothy to be gentle with such people (2:24-26), and he is able to point to his own example of patience. Likewise “love” (agape) teaches us how to live with people, and how to serve them.

But how to understand “faith” in the context of relationships? It means (i) Paul’s confidence in Christ and (ii) Paul’s faithfulness in the discharge of his calling. Paul’s eyes were always on Christ. This perspective had a transforming effect on Paul’s relationships. He was patient because he had been shown patience by God; and he served with love because Christ had served him.

- Paul's perseverance, persecutions, afflictions In this final triad of nouns Paul reminds Timothy of how he had suffered for the sake of Christ and the elect. But more than that, Paul draws Timothy's attention to two great facts: (i) that Paul had endured with hope ("perseverance" means "to bear up under a load" and in the New Testament is often associated with the hope of eternal life); and (ii) that the Lord had consistently rescued Paul.

Now, if we take the leading words of the three triads, we find that Paul is calling Timothy to remember and emulate Paul's doctrine, faith and perseverance. Paul might be saying something like this: "Let the gospel set the compass of your life and labours. Let your confidence in Christ transform all your relationships, especially with the most difficult people. And let your hope of eternal life prepare you for whatever sufferings your calling may lead you into."

(b) Paul's charge to Timothy: "Continue following me carefully" (vv. 14-15)

"In contrast to the false teachers with their constant endeavour to advance to something new, Timothy may be satisfied with what he had already received" (Donald Guthrie).

Novelty is always a temptation for the Bible student and the minister. We find new knowledge exciting – but there is a "new" knowledge which is actually deadly (2:16-18). And we can find treading the same path week by week tiresome – but in fact it is the path of the gospel and is the only way of life (1:13-14).

So Timothy (and all of us) is not to move "forward" into novelty but is to stay put ("abide/remain") in the gospel truths he had learned from Paul and of which he was convinced. By remaining he will "please his commanding officer", "compete according to the rules", and conduct himself like "a hard working farmer" (2:3-6).

Paul gives two reasons for continuing in what he has learned:

- "knowing from whom you have learned them" Timothy had been taught the Old Testament Scriptures from childhood from his mother and grandmother who were believers before him (1:5). He himself had been brought to faith by Paul (1:2), and had been closely associated with Paul (Phil. 2:19-23) and ordained by Paul (1:6). This personal knowledge of his instructors in the faith – their own doctrine, faith and perseverance – was a major reason for Timothy to have confidence in the truth of what he had believed.

We likewise have reason for gratitude if we can look at those who taught us and see the truth of the gospel confirmed by their good conduct in Christ. And we must be careful to adorn the gospel by "living lives consistent with our profession".

- "from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures" An intimate knowledge of the Bible is the second reason Paul gives for confidence. Paul's gospel was consistent with the OT. (i) The Scriptures fit together as a consistent whole. And (ii) the Scriptures fit our condition – they are consistent with: creation; our experience as "image bearers"; our condition as sinners; and our desire for salvation.



### 3. The origin and purpose of the Scriptures (vv. 15-17)

Paul says to Timothy, “You know the biblical credentials of your faith. Scripture is God-breathed and profitable. Even in the midst of these grievous times in which evil men and impostors go from bad to worse, it can make you complete and it can equip you for your work. Let the word of God make you a man of God! Remain loyal to it and it will lead you on into Christian maturity” (Stott, p. 104).

In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul asserts two truths about Scripture: (a) that “all Scripture is breathed out by God”; and (b) that “all Scripture is...profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”

What is the “all Scripture” to which Paul refers? It is the whole Bible – the Old and New Testaments. Paul was conscious that his own writings were Scripture:

- he directs that his letters be read publicly in church (Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27);
- he claims to speak in the name of Christ (2 Cor. 2:17; 13:3; Gal. 4:14);
- he calls his message “the word of God” (1 Thess. 2:13);
- he claims that in his teaching is from the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:13).

Peter also regarded Paul's letters as Scripture (2 Pet. 3:16); and in 1 Tim. 5:18 Paul includes both the regulation of Deut 25:4 and a saying of Jesus recorded in Luke 10:7 under the rubric “For the Scriptures say...”

#### (a) The origin of Scripture: breathed out by God (v. 16)

All Scripture is “given by inspiration of God”. The Greek word is “theopneustos” and it means “God-breathed”. This indicates that the Scriptures were breathed out by God, much as we breathe out when we speak. Paul's point is not that God breathed into the human authors of Scripture or into the Scriptures themselves – rather, the Scriptures are the result of God's breathing out his Word.

- The Bible claims throughout to be a communication from God. It begins with God speaking. “And God said, ‘Let there be light.’”
- From Exodus through to Deuteronomy God speaks again and again. “And God spoke to Moses, saying...”
- The prophets repeatedly claim to be speaking from God. More than 350 times they say that their words are “an utterance the LORD.” Or they announce “thus says the LORD.” Ezekiel says, “the hand of the LORD was upon me” and “the Spirit entered into me...and he spoke to me”; “the Spirit of the LORD fell upon me, and he said to me” (Ezek. 3:22, 24; 11:5).

It is of course true that the Bible was written by human authors and each author wrote in his own style. But God the Holy Spirit carried the human authors along in their work so that what they penned was the very Word of God (2 Peter 1:21).

God is the source of the Bible. What the Bible says, God says. And because the Bible is breathed out by God, it partakes of his character – it is true, reliable, and authoritative; it does not fail and it does not mislead.

(b) The competence of Scripture: profitable for Christian maturity (vv. 15-17)

This God-breathed book is “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (vv. 16-17).

Notice the order: the Bible is competent to teach what we should think, then how we should behave – true knowledge comes first and true behaviour follows after.

First *thinking*. The Bible is profitable for doctrine and for reproof (in this case the reproof concerns wrong thinking, false doctrine). It is a revelation of the true storyline of human history – a revelation of the purpose and action of God.

The Bible is not merely a human story – God is the active Person throughout. God creates; God saves Noah; God calls Abraham; God is with Joseph in Egypt; God commissions Moses; God speaks at Sinai; God leads Israel; God establishes David’s dynasty; God punishes and restores Israel; God sends Jesus; God causes the gospel message to expand out into the Roman empire; God promises to send his Son again.

The whole story focuses on Jesus, so that the Bible is “able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (v. 15).

None of this could be known by human investigation. It is what the Bible calls “the mystery” (Rom. 16:25-26; Eph. 3:8-10). It is not a mystery in the sense that only the very wise can understand it – it is a mystery in the sense that no one could perceive it until God made it known. But once God made it known, then even little children can see it (Matt. 11:25-27).

Secondly, conduct. The Bible is profitable for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.

The word translated “correction” is about setting someone upright on their feet. They have fallen down; they have done something they shouldn’t have done. But we don’t use the Bible to shout at them with loud words of judgement and condemnation – we use the Bible to help get them back on their feet. We can do that because the Bible promises forgiveness (e.g. 1 John 2:1-2) and teaches us to put vice away and put virtue on (e.g. Col. 3:8-14).

The Bible has a lot to say about conduct. It speaks about: family life; social responsibilities; the care of the poor, the widow, the orphan, and animals; commitment to the fellowship of believers; submission to authority; law and order; and neighbourliness and hospitality. The Bible speaks either directly or indirectly about every area of life. And it is competent to direct our behaviour.

In fact, the competence of the Bible is to become our competence. Verse 17 tells us that God has invested Scripture with its profitability, “so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” The word of God is to mould our lives so profoundly that we think straight and we act straight all the time and in every situation.

## 2 Timothy 4

### *Proclaim the Gospel*

There is considerable pathos and solemnity to this chapter – here are the last extant words penned by the apostle Paul, written perhaps just days before his execution. He has fought a good fight, finished the race and kept the faith (v. 7); knowing that he will shortly die (v.6), he prepares to relinquish his commission.

Paul therefore charges to Timothy to “preach the word” (v. 2). The word translated “I charge” means “to exhort with authority in matters of extraordinary importance, frequently with reference to higher powers”. This includes the idea of “testifying under oath in a court of law”. It is used in the NT in cases of solemn and emphatic utterance. Paul is speaking to Timothy as though they were standing in the court of heaven – in the presence of God and the Lord Jesus Christ (v.1) and with the utmost gravity he puts Timothy under oath, as it were, to “preach the word”.

### 1. How the Word must be preached

We have already seen the immense significance Paul places on the Word of God.

- In chapter 1 it is the message of salvation; the message that Christ came, abolished death, and brought immortality and life to light through the gospel; the message that is heralded by men sent by heaven; a message that will never fail or falter because it is guarded by God.
- In chapter 2 it is the message for which the preacher must be willing to suffer, because it is the message that suffering necessarily comes before triumph; and it is the message for which the preacher must prepare his heart and life.
- In chapter 3 it is the message from which false teachers depart, but in which true teachers abide; it is the message which is the very breathed-out-Word-of-God, competent to make us competent.

This is the Word which is to be preached. (a) It is not to be kept a private matter – it is to be proclaimed in the marketplace, just as a proclamation of the emperor was heralded in every city. (b) We have no commission to proclaim anything else.

#### (a) *Preach the Word urgently*

Paul says, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season...”

“Be ready” ⇒ “stand by”, i.e. be near to hand and ready to serve. Hence, “never lose your sense of urgency with respect to the Word!” (c.f. Ps. 123:2).

“Whatever you do, let the people see that you are in good earnest...You cannot break men’s hearts by jesting with them, or telling them a smooth tale, or patching up a gaudy oration. Men will not cast away their dearest pleasures upon a drowsy request of one that seemeth not to mean as he speaks, or to care much whether his request be granted” (Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*).

“In season and out of season” ⇒ “press the Word home on all occasions, convenient or inconvenient.” The convenience/inconvenience is that of the pastor, not the people – so there is no warrant here for being rude or assertive; rather there is an appeal against pastoral laziness: “Make the message of the gospel inescapable and relevant whether you feel like it or not.”

(b) Preach the Word relevantly

Paul says, “Preach the word!... Convince, rebuke, exhort...” Timothy must “use argument, reproof, and appeal”. It is probable that these three words refer to the way Timothy must deal with the false teachers/teaching in Ephesus:

- The false teachers must be confronted with the error in their teaching. This is about more than disapproval – the reason for the disapproval must be made clear as well. The true nature of the false teaching must be examined carefully and exposed clearly – best of all if those caught in it are brought to conviction.
- Then Timothy is to rebuke those who do not listen. The word “rebuke” is very strong – Paul uses it only here, but it is often used of Jesus when he rebuked demons. The people who have been led away must be censured.
- And if they listen to Timothy, then he is to exhort them to live out the gospel in a life of righteousness. They need to be urged strongly and encouraged.

The pastor’s approach must be intellectual, moral and emotional – he must appeal to the reason, the conscience and the will of the people (his approach will depend on the condition and the need of the people).

(c) Preach the Word patiently

Paul says, “Preach the word!... Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering...”

Urgency can be (and often is) combined with impatience. And when we grow impatient, we fall into various traps:

- badgering the people – trying to browbeat them into the response we want;
- cajoling the people – using psychological tricks such as calling for a “decision”.

But the pastor must be patient (that’s how the Lord’s servant behaves, 2:24-25); and the pastor can be patient (that’s how the hard working farmer behaves, 2:6). One sows, another waters, but God gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:5-8).

(d) Preach the Word instructively

Paul says, “Preach the word!... Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all...teaching.”

The pastoral ministry is essentially a teaching ministry – candidates must be both orthodox in faith and be apt to teach (1 Tim. 3:2) – right thinking precedes right behaviour (see last week on 3:16). This is exactly what Paul himself did in Ephesus. For 2-3 years he “did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house...I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:20,27).

## 2. Why the Word must be preached

“Paul does more than issue a charge; he adds incentives. He bids Timothy look in three directions – first at Jesus Christ the coming judge and king, secondly at the contemporary scene, and thirdly at him, Paul, the aged prisoner approaching martyrdom... So then, in view of the coming of Christ to judgment, of the contemporary world’s distaste for the gospel and of the imprisoned apostle’s imminent death, the latter’s charge to Timothy had a note of solemn urgency: *Preach the word!*” (John Stott, pp. 109,116)

### (a) Preach the Word because of the coming of Christ (v. 1)

Paul says, “I charge you, therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom: Preach the word!”

This is very solemn – Paul’s exhortation is far from a personal desire – he is putting Timothy under oath in the court of heaven (!) to “preach the word”. But this should be a great incentive – the fear of God alone is capable of delivering us from the fear of men.

The emphasis in the exhortation is on the coming again of Jesus Christ – this was especially pressing for Paul whose life was drawing to an end. The fact of Christ’s second coming is to act as a major incentive for faithfulness.

Jesus told parables which emphasised this, e.g. the parable of the faithful and the evil servants, Matt. 24:45-51; and the parable of the talents, Matt. 25:14-30. If we are faithful to the Lord in his “absence”, we will be acknowledged by him in his “presence” (Matt. 10:32-33). Thus Paul speaks not just about Christ’s “appearing” but also his “kingdom”.

### (b) Preach the Word because of the contemporary scene (vv. 3-5)

The word “for” which introduces vv. 3-5 is important. It suggests two things:

- First, preachers should seize the opportunity to preach the word under favourable conditions. Work while there is daylight (John 11:9).
- Secondly, preachers should continue to preach the word under unfavourable circumstances because people need to hear the gospel. It is true that people do not want to hear a message from heaven – they would rather listen to a message that will tickle their ears (v. 3). But preachers are meant to love people – and love should move them to continue bearing (urgent, relevant, patient and instructive) witness to the truth.

So the contemporary scene (whether favourable or unfavourable) should move preachers to preach the word. But how? In v. 5 Paul fires four rapid imperatives at Timothy telling him how he should preach, especially in dark days:

- “Be watchful in all things.” “Be watchful” is literally “be sober”. Thus, figuratively it means “keep a clear head”. This word is used in 1 Thess. 5:6,8; 1 Pet. 1:13; 4:7; 5:8. It is connected with being clear-headed in the present and because of

the future. Understand what you believe and why you believe; understand the world in which you live; always behave like one who looks for Christ's return.

- "Endure afflictions." Suffering is part and parcel of the ministry of the word (2:3), especially when people won't abide sound preaching.
- "Do the work of an evangelist." The evangel is the news that God has established his rule in a new way through the incarnation, death, resurrection and exaltation of his Son. People are woefully ignorant of this gospel – they can hear of it only if someone does the work of an evangelist (Rom. 10:14-15).
- "Fulfil your ministry." "Ministry" = "table service" – what sort of restaurant waiter stops serving halfway through a meal? So the emphasis is on the first word: "fulfil!" It isn't enough to start – the task must be carried on through to completion (Luke 9:62) – especially against opposition. "The more determined men become to despise the teaching of Christ, the more zealous should godly ministers be to assert it and the strenuous their efforts to preserve it entire, and more than that, by their diligence to ward off Satan's attacks" (Calvin).

(c) Preach the Word because the apostle is about to die (vv. 6-8)

V. 6 opens with "for I" which balances the "but you" of v. 5. So vv. 6-8 explain the urgency of v. 5 – Paul is about to die ("already I am being poured out, and the time of my departure has come"), so Timothy must carry on the ministry.

The word "departure" was used of soldiers breaking camp, or of a ship being loosed from its mooring. Paul wants Timothy to understand that he is leaving! But his death will not be a waste – it will be the pouring out of a drink offering – one last act of worship in this world (and noted by God, see Ps. 116:15).

But Paul is not downcast!

First, in v. 7 he speaks of his own life in a way designed to encourage Timothy – Paul has done what Timothy must do: he has "fought the good fight,...finished the race,...kept the faith" (cf. 2:3-6).

Notice the perfect tenses – Paul has done these things, but now his task is finished. Hence the need for Timothy to pick up the reins. There is always the need for the next generation to pick up where the preceding generation set down. The mentoring of young Christian men is especially important. It is a tragedy when there is a hiatus between generations, e.g. when the older generation laments the failure of the younger generation to attend the missionary prayer meeting and the midweek Bible study; or when the younger generation laments the older generation's failure to teach the Word with clarity and power.

Secondly, in v. 8 Paul speaks of the reward – the crown of righteousness – which he will receive at Christ's appearing (bringing us full circle to the theme of v. 1).

The "crown of righteousness" could mean "perfect righteousness as the crowning blessing of those who have striven faithfully." But it is more likely that it means "the victory crown given to everyone who is righteous and who lives a life of righteousness" – which accords with the "crown of life" mentioned in James 1:12.

### 3. Paul's personal testimony

Paul's closing words are replete with personal testimony: Paul has done exactly what he is charging Timothy to do, namely to preach the word in season and out of season. Paul's conditions could hardly have been more unfavourable: bereft of friends, opposed by an aggressive adversary, and unsupported by the Roman Christians. He must have felt quite isolated. And yet he seized the opportunity to proclaim the gospel to the imperial court when on trial for his life.

Stott (p. 125) quotes Plummer: "It is quite possible that this event, which the Apostle of the Gentiles regards as the completing act of his own mission and ministry, took place in the forum itself... But at any rate it would be held in a court to which the public had access; and the Roman public at this time was the most representative in the world... In that representative city and before that representative audience he preached Christ; and through those who were present and heard him the fact would be made known throughout the civilized world that in the imperial city and before the imperial bench the Apostle of Christ had proclaimed the coming of his kingdom."

#### (a) Bereft of human comfort (vv. 9-13, 19-21)

Paul mentions 12 men with whom he had enjoyed fellowship in gospel labours: Demas, Crescens, Titus, Luke, Mark, Tychicus, Carpus, Prisca, Aquila, Onesiphorus, Erastus and Trophimus. Of these 12 only Luke was still with him (in addition, it is likely that the four named in v. 21 – Eubulus, Pudens, Linus and Claudia – were Roman Christians who had visited Paul in prison).

Paul's very human loneliness is evident. He longs for Timothy's company ("greatly desiring to see you," 1:4), urging him to come before winter (which would make travelling impossible, v. 21), and to bring Mark with him (v. 11). Did Timothy succeed in coming before Paul's death? We don't know.

In addition to his desire for the company of friends, Paul desired warm clothing (v. 13a) and the intellectual stimulation of his books (v. 13b). The effect of this threefold desire for company, warmth and work is to impress us with Paul's humanity. "When our spirit is lonely, we need friends. When our body is cold, we need clothing. When our mind is bored, we need books. To admit this is not unspiritual; it is human... We must not, then, deny our humanity or frailty, or pretend that we are of other stuff than dust" (Stott, p. 121).

#### (b) Opposed by Alexander the coppersmith (vv. 14-15)

Paul also felt the opposition of a coppersmith called Alexander. (Alexander was a common name, so there is no reason to identify this Alexander with Alexander the heretic of 1 Tim. 1:20 or the Alexander the orator of Acts 19:33).

In v. 14 Paul says that Alexander the coppersmith "indicated many bad things concerning me" (literal translation) It seems that he was either an informer, or an adverse witness, or both. Verse 15b (he "strongly opposed our message") may indicate that Alexander was an aggressive adversary in the imperial court.

In v. 14a Paul says, “May the Lord repay him according to his works.” This is an imprecation and is in line with imprecations in the Psalms (e.g. Ps. 69:22-28). However, in other Greek manuscripts Paul says, “The Lord will repay him according to his works.” This is no less severe, and the wording provides a marked contrast with Paul’s confidence that the Lord will “repay” him with the crown of righteousness on the Day of his return (v. 8).

(c) Unsupported at his first defence (v. 16)

Paul’s “first defence” was a preliminary investigation which preceded the formal trial. Roman law permitted him to employ an advocate and call witnesses. But “no one stood with me, but all forsook me” (v. 16).

This was the moment when Paul needed support. But association with Paul was dangerous, and the Christians’ courage failed, so that “among all the Christians in Rome there was not one who would stand at his side in court either to speak on his behalf, or to advise him in the conduct of his case, or to support him by a demonstration of sympathy” (Plummer, cited by Stott, p. 123).

(d) Sustained by grace and aiming at Christ’s glory (vv. 17-22)

There are nine verbal similarities between Ps. 22 and vv. 10 and 16-18 of this chapter. It would appear that Paul was meditating on the Psalm during his crisis.

So Paul knew that he was not alone: “The Lord stood with me and strengthened me” (v. 17) – delivering Paul from “the mouth of the lion” (a metaphor for mortal danger since, as a Roman citizen, Paul would be executed by the sword) and sustaining Paul so that he could proclaim the gospel.

Now we can see what a superb illustration Paul gave Timothy of his charge to “preach the word”. Paul was under tremendous pressure (bereft of human comfort, opposed by an aggressive adversary, unsupported by the Roman Christians). Surely now he would think of himself, indulge in self-pity, and use his rhetorical powers to plead his innocence. But instead Paul’s overriding concern is not himself but Christ: not his own defence but the proclamation of the gospel.

Paul was strengthened by Christ “so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear” (v. 17). It was because he did this – in the imperial court, and possibly before the emperor himself – that Paul could say, “I have finished the race” (v. 7).

In this way, then, Paul modelled the very heart of his exhortation to Timothy:

- his goal was Christ’s glory (“To him be glory forever and ever. Amen!” v. 18);
- and his resource was Christ’s grace (“The Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Grace be with you. Amen,” v. 22).

“It would be difficult to find a better summary than these two sentences of the apostle’s life and ambition. First, he received grace from Christ. Then he returned glory to Christ. ‘From him grace; to him glory.’ In all our Christian life and service we should desire no other philosophy than this” (Stott, p. 127).