

2 Timothy

Authorship

Though modern scholarship has questioned the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles, internal evidence points to Paul. His relationship with Timothy is documented in the book of Acts and referenced in a number of letters (Rom., 1 & 2 Cor., Phil., Col., 1 & 2 Thess., Philemon). Content wise, 2 Timothy is the sort of letter a concerned father might write to his spiritual son during a time of crisis. The church's possession of 2 Timothy provides an important facet of Paul's apostolic ministry, a very personal side, that has served as great encouragement for all ministers of the gospel through the centuries.¹

Date

Assuming that Paul was imprisoned a second time prior to his martyrdom, 2 Timothy was pretty certainly written in A.D. 67. His death seems imminent from the reference in 2 Timothy 4:6.²

Historical Setting

Paul is imprisoned and expecting imminent execution. Since there is good reason for hypothesizing his release from the Roman imprisonment mentioned in Acts, this would refer to a subsequent confinement, which ended in his martyrdom. The church has become well established and has gained a significant measure of independence from Judaism. It is also coming under greater and greater persecution, especially since Nero's action in A.D. 64. Paul writes as one who has experienced first hand such ill treatment.

Original Readers

Unlike 1 Timothy, which seems to be more of a semi-private letter, Paul's second letter to his spiritual son, is quite personal. Timothy obviously shared its contents with others, but its original intent was to exhort an individual to fulfill his ministry.

¹ For a fairly complete handling of the arguments for and against Pauline authorship see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* 4th ed. revised (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 607-49.

² See Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 387; and Guthrie, *Introduction*, 651.

Occasion

Paul is moved to write to Timothy out of concern over a perceived slackening of his ministry obligations and out of a desire to call his son in the faith to his side in light of his imminent execution.

Message

Faithfulness in using one's gift, even in the face of hardship, will insure the completion of god-given ministry and will result in future reward.

Outline

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| I. | Salutation: Paul writes as apostle and father to Timothy. | 1:1-2 |
| II. | Prologue: Paul thanks God for Timothy, admonishing him in his ministry. | 1:3-18 |
| | A. Paul rehearses their experience in ministry. | 1:3-12 |
| | 1. Paul recalls Timothy's faith. | 1:3-5 |
| | 2. Paul reminds Timothy to rekindle his gift. | 1:6-7 |
| | 3. Paul requests that Timothy not be ashamed of the gospel. | 1:8-12 |
| | a. He should be willing to suffer with Paul for the gospel. | 1:8 |
| | b. He should reflect on the grace received in Christ. | 1:9 |
| | c. He should be motivated in the gospel because it reveals life and immortality. | 1:10-11 |
| | d. He should be encouraged by God's faithfulness. | 1:12 |
| | B. Paul charges Timothy to guard the message he had received. | 1:13-18 |
| | 1. It is a divinely grant trust. | 1:13-14 |
| | 2. It has been forsaken by some. | 1:15-18 |
| III. | Body: Paul admonishes Timothy to fulfill his calling as a minister of the Word of truth. | 2:1-4:8 |
| | A. He must endure hardship for the sake of the word. | 2:1-13 |
| | 1. He must commit the word to faithful men by the strength of grace. | 2:1-2 |
| | 2. He must endure in order to fulfill this task. | 2:3-13 |
| | a. A good soldier endures hardship. | 2:3-4 |
| | b. A crownable athlete competes according to the rules. | 2:5 |
| | c. The laboring farmer partakes of his work. | 2:6-7 |
| | 3. He must endure for the testimony of Christ. | 2:8-9 |
| | 4. He must endure for the sake of the elect. | 2:10 |
| | 5. He must endure for a share in Christ's reign. | 2:11-13 |
| | B. He must contend skillfully in disputes regarding the word. | 2:14-26 |
| | 1. He must stifle profitless arguments about the word. | 2:14 |
| | 2. He must be diligent in his handling of the word. | 2:15 |
| | 3. He must avoid misleading banter that undermines faith. | 2:16-22 |
| | a. This type of talk will result in increased ungodliness. | 2:16-18 |
| | b. This type of talk goes hand in hand with iniquity. | 2:19-22 |
| | 1) Believers must depart from iniquity. | 2:19 |
| | 2) Useful vessels are cleansed of iniquity. | 2:20-21 |
| | 3) Timothy must pursue righteousness. | 2:22 |

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| 4. | He must be an agent of truth not strife. | 2:23-26 |
| | a. He must not be, via foolish words, a participant in strife. | 2:23 |
| | b. He must be, as a teacher, the agent of restoration. | 2:24-26 |
| C. | He must be a model of the personal application of the word. | 3:1-17 |
| | 1. The last days will produce men of unprincipled behavior. | 3:1-9 |
| | a. They will have a false appearance of godliness. | 3:1-5 |
| | b. They will prey on the unstable. | 3:6-7 |
| | c. They will be recognizable as disapproved. | 3:8-9 |
| | 2. Timothy must demonstrate exemplary behavior. | 3:10-17 |
| | a. He had Paul as a worthwhile example. | 3:10-13 |
| | 1) His life had embodied the truth. | 3:10 |
| | 2) His path had invited persecution. | 3:11-13 |
| | b. He had the Scriptures as abiding resource. | 3:14-17 |
| | 1) They enable godly living. | 3:14-15 |
| | 2) They equip for godly service. | 3:16-17 |
| D. | He must commit himself completely to his calling. | 4:1-5 |
| | 1. He must preach the word while there is opportunity. | 4:1-4 |
| | 2. He must give attention to his entire ministry. | 4:5 |
| E. | He will do well to remember the reward of ministering the word. | 4:6-8 |
| | 1. Paul's life exemplifies the need to endure to the end. | 4:6-7 |
| | 2. Paul's expectation amplifies the benefit of enduring to the end. | 4:8 |
| IV. | Epilogue: Paul recalls his associations in the ministry of the word. | 4:9-21 |
| | A. He has experienced rejection and acceptance because of the word. | 4:9-16 |
| | B. He has experienced the Lord's faithfulness in proclaiming the word. | 4:17-18 |
| | C. He greets those who remain committed. | 4:19-21 |
| V. | Benediction. | 4:22 |

Message

Faithfulness in using one's gift, even in the face of hardship, will insure the completion of god-given ministry and will result in future reward.

Argument

Paul writes a follow-up letter to his dear associate in ministry for the purpose of encouraging him to be faithful to his god-given task, the ministry of the Word. Out of obvious concern over Timothy's present situation, the great apostle, in the hour of his martyrdom, warns and encourages his long-time companion not to wane in his service as had so many others. Hardship and persecution need not deter the servant of God from his appointed ministry, as Paul's life so powerfully demonstrated. There are adequate resources and the most noble motivation for such perseverance—the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. Salutation: Paul writes as apostle and father to Timothy (1:1-2).

Paul writes to Timothy out of his authority as an apostle and his love as a father. Timothy will need both perspectives to counter the deleterious effects of fear and opposition.

II. Prologue: Paul thanks God for Timothy, admonishing him in his ministry (1:3-18).

As in most of his letters, Paul uses his introductory comments to set an encouraging tone in light of God's work in the readers' lives as well as to introduce his main issue of concern. In Timothy's case it has to do with his sound grounding in the faith through his mother and grandmother (1:3-5), as set against the present need to rekindle his spiritual gift, which, apparently, had been somewhat compromised through a spirit of fear (1:6-7). Paul recounts his own unashamed steadfastness in proclamation of Christ as a positive example for Timothy to follow when facing the deterring effect of suffering (1:8). Meditation upon the great salvation in Christ ought to produce sufficient motivation for such a stance (1:9-11) coupled with conscious certainty of divine approval in the eternal future (1:12).

Paul's specific charge to Timothy is to maintain steadfast continuance in the proclamation and application of the divine message handed down through the apostle by the Holy Spirit who dwells in them both (1:13-14). Many have failed to do this, though not all (1:15-18).

III. Body: Paul admonishes Timothy to fulfill his calling as a minister of the Word of truth (2:1-4:8).

The main body of the letter explores the ways in which Timothy must engage in his ministry in order to fulfill it. It includes both positive and negative instruction.

A. He must endure hardship for the sake of the word (2:1-13).

Timothy's struggle lies not in doctrinal defection, but rather in the tendency to cave in to the pressures posed by opponents who were permeated with the spirit of the world. Hence, the first admonition deals with the willing acceptance of whatever toil and hardship may be entailed in the ministry of making sure the word was passed on to faithful agents (2:1-7). This suffering is essential in properly honoring the person and work of Christ (2:8-9), for the salvation of the elect (2:10), and for earning the right to heightened participation in the coming reign of Christ (2:11-13).

B. He must contend skillfully in disputes regarding the Word (2:14-26).

Another threat to the fulfilling of his ministry lies in the way the Word was handled. Timothy must learn to wield it accurately and profitably, in contrast to those who

merely use it as a platform for fleshly wrangling, which in the end only undermines people's faith (2:14-18). This type of ministry results in iniquity not righteousness. Timothy, in contrast, must prove himself to be a vessel suited for every good work by the display of a life that is transformed and governed by the Master of the Word (2:18-22). It is not that Timothy should avoid engaging others in contending for the truth. He should just make sure that he does so as an agent of truth, who trusts God with the ultimate responsibility of repentance and response, rather than merely being a participant in strife (2:23-26).

Since it is assured that unprincipled behavior will only increase in the last days (3:1-9), Timothy must demonstrate exemplary behavior, fully aware that such a life will invite persecution by the ungodly (3:12-13). For living this kind of life, Timothy has the example of Paul (3:10-11) and the resource of the Scriptures applied in faith (3:14-17). This is to be Timothy's sole confidence with respect to both the daily exigencies of life and the fulfillment of his calling (3:16-17).

D. He must commit himself completely to his calling (4:1-5).

Armed with such a perspective, Timothy must make a decision to give himself unreservedly to his calling, namely, the ministry of the Word (4:1-2) no matter what the response (4:3-4) or the need of the moment (4:4-5).

E. He will do well to remember the reward of ministering the word (4:6-8).

As added motivation, Timothy will do well to remember the reward for faithful ministry, both in the present satisfaction of accomplishment and in future honor at the judgment seat of Christ (4:6-8). On the eve of his martyrdom, the greatest legacy that Paul could possibly leave his son in the faith, is the example of a life well lived and ministry fully completed, all out of love for the Savior.

IV. Epilogue: Paul recalls his associations in the ministry of the word (4:9-21).

In one of the most extensive listing of ministry associates and Christian friends, Paul reveals another aspect of faithful service: the preciousness of fellowship in a work well done for a cause truly worth pursuing (4:9-21). But whether in the company of the faithful or in the solitude of abandonment, the believer's ultimate resource is the Lord himself (4:17-18).

In this way, Paul leaves a legacy of encouragement for everyone who has taken up the Lord's personal calling, and who struggles against the hardship of persecution and

feelings of abandonment. Paul has been faithful to the end (cf. 4:6-8). The challenge for Timothy is to do the same.

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