



“Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised” (Ps. 48:1). Let’s continue to worship our great God by turning to the New Testament book of 2 Timothy (p. 935, ESV pew Bible).

We finished our study of 1 Timothy the last Sunday before Easter. Two weeks ago, we celebrated the Resurrection and its significance for us today as we focused on the theme *dead to sin, alive to God*. We then saw this spiritual reality portrayed through baptism.

Last Sunday, Reid Ferguson preached a fantastic message on *True Faith* from Luke 5. Now we begin a series on 2 Timothy – a letter that challenges us to *fight the good fight, finish the race, and keep the faith*. Look with me, if you would, at the first seven verses:

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus,

² To Timothy, my beloved child:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

³ I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. ⁴ As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. ⁵ I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. ⁶ For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, ⁷ for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

Paul’s opening paragraph is pregnant with affection and affirmation toward Timothy. Paul wrote this letter from a Roman prison, where he is awaiting execution. But instead of focusing on himself and his dismal circumstances, Paul encourages Timothy amid his trials and enjoins him throughout this letter to guard the gospel (ch. 1), to suffer for the gospel (ch. 2), to continue in the gospel (ch. 3), and to proclaim the gospel (ch. 4).¹ In his final letter, Paul is preoccupied not with himself or even Timothy, per se. Paul is preoccupied with the gospel.

Are you? If not, this letter shows why you should be! If you have yet to commit your life to Christ, the gospel shows you how you can be free from guilt, be fully forgiven by God, and be granted the gift of eternal life.

If you are already a Christian, believing that Jesus died for your sins, rose from the dead, and acts on your behalf before God’s throne, then you should be preoccupied with the gospel, too. The gospel is not just the ABC’s but also the A to Z of the Christian life. It’s not like we get saved by the gospel and then mature in the Christian life by other means.

¹ David Platt, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, edited by David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2013), 134.

The gospel that saves us continues to change us as we believe it more deeply and embrace it more fully as life goes on.²

We see this in Paul's greeting to Timothy.

Paul's Greeting (vv. 1-2)

Paul saturates his greeting with gospel encouragement. He begins by identifying himself as "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God" (v. 1a). So, what Paul is about to say is not an empty wish from a well-intended friend. Paul has been sent by Christ himself and speaks on his behalf with the authority of God himself.

But Paul says something else about his apostleship in verse 1. He is an apostle not only "of Christ Jesus," but also "according to *the promise of life* that is *in Christ Jesus*." Think about Paul's circumstances as he writes this. He's on death row. He could be executed at any time. Worst of all, he's being executed unjustly. "But for Paul, 'the promise of . . . life' resolves the problem of death."³ How so? Paul tells us in verse 10: because "Christ Jesus . . . abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

Paul expounds on this truth in his other epistles, emphasizing that because Jesus died and rose again, he conquered death, he defeated death, he took away death's sting and has delivered his people from the fear of death.

Do you see what Paul's doing here in verse 1? He's applying the gospel to himself – and we should do the same. If the gospel resolves the problem of death, surely it can deal with the problems of life.

What problems are you facing? Let's be even more specific:

- What's the most difficult situation you're facing right now?
- What are you finding hard to cope with?
- What keeps you up at night or plagues your thoughts throughout the day?

Is it an unresolved conflict with family members or friends? Is it the weight of guilt from past sins and failures? Is it a health issue that you or a loved one is facing? Is it financial pressure, a pending sale, an approaching deadline, or a quota that must be met? Is it a big decision that must be made, or a new set of circumstances that you're adjusting to?

Whatever the case may be, you have – through the gospel – the resources of God at your disposal! In verse 2, Paul says, "To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." Nowadays, letters begin with "Dear so-and-so," but back in the Greco-Roman culture of Paul's day, letters began with *charein*, the Greek word for "greetings." But Paul changed it to *charis*, the Greek word for "grace."

² Adapted from a Facebook Post by Timothy Keller on June 21, 2021.

³ Philip Graham Ryken, 1 Timothy, Reformed Expository Commentary, series editors Richard D. Phillips and Philip Graham Ryken, New Testament editor Daniel M. Doriani (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007), 7.

“Greetings!”
(*chairein*)

“Grace!”
(*charis*)

Given the trials that Timothy is facing, he needs more than a *hello*. He needs *help*! So, Paul points Timothy to God’s grace. It provides not only pardon for our sin but also power for every situation. James 4:6 simply states, “He gives more grace.” F. F. Bruce wrote, “There is no limit to the supply of grace which God has placed at his people’s disposal in Christ.”⁴

That grace is accompanied by “mercy” and “peace.” *Mercy* is God’s special care for a person in need. The Old Testament equivalent is the Hebrew word *hesed*, which speaks of the steadfast love of the Lord for his people. Even as the prophet Jeremiah lamented the destruction of Jerusalem in his day, he reminded himself and all who heard him,

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;
His mercies never come to an end;
They are new every morning;
Great is your faithfulness.

- Lamentations 3:22-23

“Peace” is the third component of this gospel blessing. The peace that the gospel brings is first and foremost peace *with* God (Rom. 5:1), which means that believers are no longer God’s enemies but have been reconciled to him through the saving work of his Son. But the gospel also entails peace *from* God. Jesus said to his followers, “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Don’t let your heart be troubled or fearful” (John 14:27 CSB). The peace that Jesus gives is far superior to the world’s peace because it doesn’t depend on favorable circumstances but is rooted in a right relationship with Jesus himself, regardless of our circumstances.

Our goal is to *appropriate* the grace, mercy, and peace that God has provided for us. We do that by constantly exploring the ways that the gospel answers the issues of life.⁵ *What resources does the gospel of peace provide when I’m facing conflict with others? How does the gospel of God’s grace relieve me of my guilt? How does the message of God’s mercy, his special care for those in need, meet me in the crisis that I’m facing?*

In Christ we have everything we need for everything we face on the road of life. When’s the last time you took the gospel out for a spin? A powerful car does little good if it never leaves the garage. In the same way, we progress in the Christian life only as we put our knowledge of God into gear and find out what it can do.⁶

Paul knew the power of the gospel and was pleased with Timothy’s progress.

⁴ Cited by David Jeremiah in *Turning Point* [online]. Accessed 23 August 2018 at <https://www.oneplace.com/ministries/turning-point/read/articles/grace-upon-grace-16941.html>; Internet.

⁵ Ryken, 7.

⁶ Car analogy adapted from Dave Harvey, *When Sinners Say “I Do”*: Discovering the Power of the Gospel for Marriage (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2007), 62-63.

Paul's Gratitude (vv. 3-5)

³ I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. ⁴ As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. ⁵ I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.

- 2 Timothy 1:3-5

We can only imagine how encouraged Timothy was to know that Paul constantly prayed for him. I know how encouraged I was when a fellow pastor texted me yesterday morning, saying, "Praying for much help with the sermon. Will continue to pray for the entire family. God is faithful!" Then yesterday afternoon a church member sent me a text, saying, "Hey, pastor, just wanted you to know that I was just praying for you as you prepare tomorrow's sermon." Words like that put wind in my sails. And I know the same is true for you.

A few days ago one of our church members went through his first round of chemotherapy. His Growth Group organized time slots to cover the entire three hours in prayer. At the end of the day, this brother sent an update, saying, "The Lord brought me through it. The prayers of so many were answered." He went on to share five brief points of praise and punctuated each one by saying, "Praise God for answered prayer." He then thanked everyone for their "continued encouragement, support and prayer."

Good things happen when God's people pray. Believers are encouraged and the church is edified. So, let us pray for one another and assure one another of our prayers, even as Paul did with respect to Timothy.

As Paul does so, he states "for the record" that he serves God with a clear conscience. "This makes sense because imprisonment is typically a sign of guilt; Paul knows that he is innocent, and it is proper for him to say so"⁷ for the sake of his gospel witness. In Acts 24, Paul was falsely accused before Governor Felix by Tertullus, the spokesman for Paul's persecutors. When the governor motioned for Paul to speak, he replied, "...I cheerfully make my defense. ... These men cannot prove the things they accuse me of doing" (vv. 10, 13). Then, after testifying of his hope in God and that he will resurrect both the righteous and the unrighteous (v. 15), Paul declared, "So I always take pains to have a clear conscience before God and all people" (v. 16). Every Christian should do the same.

Paul's faith was the real deal, and he had every assurance that Timothy's was sincere, too. This faith was evident first in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. Praise God for parents and grandparents who set an example of sincere faith for their children and grandchildren.

What assurance did Paul have that Timothy's faith was genuine, that it was for real? What were the indications of such faith?

⁷ Ryken, 9.

1. **His godly reputation:** It is possible that Timothy came to faith in Christ when Paul visited the city of Lystra on his first missionary journey in Acts 14. In Acts 16, Luke tells us that when Paul visited Lystra a second time, “a disciple was there, named Timothy,” and “he was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium” (vv. 1-2) – towns that were twenty miles apart from each other. Christians throughout the region spoke highly of Timothy, referring to his spiritual growth and maturity.
2. **His faithful service.** One study Bible gives a timeline of Timothy’s ministry up to the writing of 2 Timothy, from AD 50 to AD 67. Listen as I read in rapid-fire succession these snapshots of Timothy’s service during this 17-year stretch:
 - Timothy ministers with Paul and Silas in Philippi (AD 50).
 - Paul flees Berea; Timothy and Silas continue the work (AD 51).
 - Timothy rejoins Paul in Athens and brings word of the work in Macedonia (AD 51).
 - Timothy returns to Thessalonica to encourage the new believers (AD 51-52).
 - Timothy joins Paul in his ministry in Corinth, bringing word of progress in Thessalonica (AD 52).
 - Timothy comes to Ephesus to work with Paul during Paul’s three-year ministry (AD 54-56).
 - Paul sends Timothy with the 1 Corinthians letter to disordered church in Corinth (AD 56).
 - Paul comes to Corinth in person and from there he and Timothy write Romans (AD 57).
 - Timothy is with Paul during Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome (AD 60-62).
 - Upon his release from his first imprisonment, Paul goes to Ephesus and appoints Timothy as pastor (AD 62).
 - Paul writes 1 Timothy and Titus (AD 62-64).
 - Major persecutions of the Christians in Rome begin, following the great fire (AD 64).
 - Paul returns to Rome, is arrested, and writes 2 Timothy from the Mamertime Prison (AD 67?).
 - Paul’s martyrdom in Rome (AD 67?)⁸

In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, which he also wrote from prison, Paul exhorts believers to adopt the same mindset as Christ Jesus, the ultimate Servant. In that same chapter, Paul goes on to say,

Now I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon so that I too may be encouraged by news about you. For I have no one else like-minded who will genuinely care about your interests; all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know his proven character, because he has served with me in the gospel ministry like a son with a father.

- Philippians 2:19-22

⁸ HCSB study Bible (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), 2082-83. Cited in David Platt, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, edited by David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2013), 138.

No wonder Paul addresses Timothy as “my beloved child” in this second letter (2 Tim. 1:2). Paul had personally witnessed over a span of many years Timothy’s godly character, his faithful service, his selfless spirit, his proven worth. He remembered Timothy’s tears at their last parting, and he longed to see Timothy again so that Paul would be filled with joy.

What comes to people’s minds when they think about you? What sort of reputation do you have in your town, your school, your workplace? Are you well-spoken of by your brothers and sisters in Christ? Do you serve God with a clear conscience, calibrating it according to God’s word?

Timothy was as faithful as they come, but God wasn’t finished with him yet. There was more progress to be made. So, after thanking God and expressing appreciation for Timothy, Paul appeals to Timothy.

Paul’s Guidance (vv. 6-7)

“For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (2 Tim. 1:6-7). The “gift of God” may be the Holy Spirit or to the gifts that he bestows. These are closely connected, as indicated by Jesus’ teachings on the generosity of God the Father toward his children. In Matthew 7:11, Jesus says to his disciples, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give **good things** to those who ask him?” But, in Luke 11:13, Jesus says, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the **Holy Spirit** to those who ask him?”

Every Christian is indwelt by the Spirit from the moment of conversion. Not everyone will have a godly mother, grandmother, or mentor, but every believer has the Holy Spirit. He is God’s gift to us.

So, perhaps the word “spirit” in verse 7 should be capitalized: “For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.” This is good news for Christians who feel timid, weak, and inadequate – as Timothy surely did.

- God’s power enables us to overcome our fears to do what’s right and pleasing to him, whether it’s sharing the gospel with non-Christian classmates or coworkers, taking on a new ministry, confronting a fellow Christian, or persevering through a difficult situation.
- “Because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom. 5:5), we can love others, being patient, kind, humble, forgiving, hopeful, believing the best about others, never giving up on them, and rejoicing whenever the truth wins out.
- Finally, the Spirit gives “self-control,” in the sense of self-mastery. Philip Towner writes,

Paul has in mind a measure of control over one's thinking and actions that allows a balanced outlook on any situation. When everything is coming unglued, this quality of "level-headedness" will keep the Christian focused calmly on the power and love that the Spirit provides, and so it makes perseverance in life and ministry possible.⁹

This past Thursday at our monthly Reformation Society meeting, about thirty pastors and other church leaders gathered to worship and encourage one another in the Lord. One of the hymns we sang was Martin Luther's classic, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*. As we sang that hymn, I was reminded of how the fourth stanza of that hymn extols the word of Christ and the wonder of the Spirit and the gifts:

That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth.
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also.
The body they may kill; God's truth abideth still:
His kingdom is forever.

That's the message that Paul, in his last recorded letter, drives home to Timothy.

Knowing that my dad is 87 years old, I wonder which letter he sends me will be his last. So, I make a point to save his letters. I wonder how Timothy felt when he got this letter from Paul, his spiritual father, knowing that Paul was about to die. Timothy saved this letter, and the Holy Spirit has preserved it down through the centuries for our benefit.

Let's take our cue from Paul and fortify one another's faith through godly remembrances and reminders. That, I think, is the key takeaway from this passage.

Fortify one another's faith
through godly remembrances and reminders.

Take note of Paul's words: "I thank God ... I remember you ... I remember your tears ... I am reminded of your sincere faith ... I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God...."

These words are for us. Let us use these words to encourage and build up one another. Every Timothy needs a Paul, and every Paul needs a Timothy. Whom are you bringing along in the faith, and who is building you up in yours? Are you fanning into flame the gift of God that is in you?

Don't leave the gospel parked in your garage. Put it into gear and see what it can do.

⁹ Philip H. Towner, *1-2 Timothy & Titus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 155. Cited in R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chappell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit*, Preaching the Word, edited by R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 187.