

2 Timothy 1

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Today, we recognize that we speak to God through prayer, and God speaks to us through His word. As we study the Bible, we learn what God wishes us to be. However, I suspect that just about every Christian has wondered at one time or another what God would say to us if He did give us a personal message. Would He be pleased or displeased with us? Would His assessment of our strengths and weaknesses match up with our own? What, above all else, would God want us personally to focus on, and would it be something that we were strong enough to do?

In all the history of the world, the only man to receive not just one but two such personal messages from God is Paul's student Timothy. We've just finished going through the first of these messages, which we have in the book of 1 Timothy. As we look at it, though, what strikes us about it is that it's much more addressed to Timothy's situation than to his person. Paul is telling Timothy what any young preacher would need to know to work effectively at Ephesus.

2 Timothy, though, is a very different book. No longer is Paul concerned with things like how to appoint elders and deacons, or how to determine whether a particular widow is worthy of church assistance. In fact, Paul expects Timothy to leave the church where he is working and come to him. Instead, Paul focuses in on Timothy's work and character. This may well have been the last contact that Paul ever had with Timothy, and his love and respect for his longtime student are evident. However, the affection that Paul and the Holy Spirit share for Timothy don't allow them to let him off the hook. Just as the book is filled with praise for Timothy, it's also filled with encouragement to do better.

Despite the personal nature of this letter, it has much to teach us today. Paul addresses such central themes of Christianity that his words are just as useful to us as to Timothy. With this in mind, let's consider 2 Timothy 1.

Relationships and Service.

This epistle begins, as indeed most do, with a section of **GREETINGS**. These appear in 2 Timothy 1:1-2. Even in this opening section, there are still a couple of things that are useful for us to consider. First of all, as Paul so often does, he uses this introductory material to mount another defense of his apostleship. In this, we see Paul's awareness that he is writing an open letter. He doesn't expect Timothy to keep this to himself, so Paul is writing with an eye to a future audience as well. He tells Timothy and us that he's an apostle not because he wanted to be, but because God wanted him to be. Likewise, his motivation for all of his arduous service is the promise of eternal life that awaits him.

However, even though Paul's eyes are firmly fixed on heaven by this point, he still hasn't forgotten those dear to him on earth. Timothy wasn't any kind of blood relation to Paul. His father wasn't even Jewish. Nonetheless, Paul describes him once more, just as he did so long ago in 1 Corinthians, as Paul's beloved child. This was the kind of connection that Paul had to his fellow workers, and it's the kind of connection we need to seek to have with one another.

This spiritual connection, though, didn't mean that the earthly ties of blood were unimportant, and Paul zeroes in on these as he discusses the **ORIGINS OF FAITH**. We find this discussion in 2 Timothy 1:3-5. Paul begins this by broaching a subject that might surprise us—his connection to his Jewish ancestors. After all, those were men who lived and died under the Law of Moses, and Paul had abandoned Moses in favor of Christ. However, despite this difference, Paul emphasizes one key similarity. Even though he and his ancestors served under different covenants, they lived with a clear conscience that desired above all to please God, and Paul saw this same godliness in Timothy as well. He thanked God for Timothy's faith and prayed for him night and day. Even though they were parted, he longed to see him again.

Timothy, of course, hadn't learned about God from his pagan father, but like Paul, he owed his faith to his ancestors too. In this case, though, the significant ancestors were not men but women. The training that Timothy had received from his mother Lois and his grandmother Eunice had implanted their faith in his heart. Even without a strong male role model, they raised him to be a man of such character that Paul respected and trusted him above all others.

Today, the example of Lois and Eunice can be a source of great encouragement for daughters of God who find themselves in less than ideal family situations. I just heard the other day about a situation where a sister was let down and deceived by her husband in a truly terrible way, so badly that a worldly woman in her situation would have divorced him without a second thought. I know things like that happen all the time. They may even be happening to women in this congregation right now. However, we must remember that circumstances that seem so devastating to our human wisdom can be overcome through the power of God. The Christian woman who is determined to serve Him and to lead her children in His ways can find victory with His help. She need only have the faith of Lois and Eunice.

After reminding Timothy of his background, Paul uses it to goad him into **KINDLING THE GIFT**. This is evident in 2 Timothy 1:6-7. When the text in this version says, "stir up", it's drawing the comparison to what you do with a fire that is dying. You stick a poker into the middle of it and stir it up so that it will burst into flame once again. Paul's implication is that Timothy has let the spiritual gift that he has from Paul dwindle into ashes. He isn't using it for the

Lord as he should, and it's time for him to change that. This same advice can apply to us equally well. Are we doing everything we can for the Lord with everything He has given to us, or have the fires of our zeal gone cold instead? From time to time, we may well need to stir ourselves into action, to make sure that the Lord will judge us profitable servants.

Paul goes on to imply that the reason why Timothy has become inactive is because of fear. However, Paul says, that fear isn't from God. Instead, God has given us a spirit of power and love and of a sound mind. Interestingly enough, this passage showed up in the recent TV coverage of the NCAA basketball tournament. CBS aired the pre-game locker-room talk of the coach for Murray State, and he based it on this verse. The funny thing about it was that the announcer didn't recognize it as the Bible, but he liked the concept so well that he kept talking about it through the entire game. This concept is powerful in our own lives too, brethren. God didn't set us up to do nothing. He didn't set us up to fail. If we tap into His power, seek out His love, and train our minds according to His wisdom, we can handle whatever life has to throw at us, whether individually or as a group. Let's remember the spirit we have been given.

Following Paul's Example.

Back in the first century, Timothy was going to need this power and love and discipline because of the **SUFFERING FOR THE GOSPEL** he was going to have to endure. Paul brings up this unpalatable subject in 2 Timothy 1:8-10. We need to recognize, friends, that when Timothy gathered his courage and took a stand for the Lord, he wasn't just risking the disdain of his friends and co-workers. He was risking beatings, imprisonment, and even death. Paul is not terribly concerned. If serving God leads to suffering, Timothy needs to be OK with that. So do we. Too often, we're deterred from what we know God wants because of fear of others. That fear is the devil's weapon, and he'll use it to keep us out of heaven if he can. Without flinching, we need to embrace the possibility that speaking out for the truth may cost us, and if it does, we need to learn to rejoice in the treasure we are laying up for ourselves in heaven.

Like Timothy, we should be willing to suffer because of the greatness of the message we preach. None of us can hope to justify ourselves, but we can hope to be justified by the grace of God. When we tell others about Jesus, we're telling them about the greatest man ever to live, who fought against death and won, and who can give us immortality and eternal life too. The blessings of the gospel are so great as to be incalculable. When we bear such an important message, it's worth the risk of a little suffering to proclaim it, because of all the lost souls who need so desperately to hear it.

In this fearless preaching, Timothy is to follow **PAUL'S EXAMPLE**. Paul explains what he's done and why in 2 Timothy 1:11-12. It might sound like an impressive thing to us that Paul was a preacher and teacher and apostle, but in his own day, those things were anything but a mark of distinction. Instead, they brought him ridicule and persecution from Jews and Gentiles alike. Paul had the brains and the connections to be a somebody, but he chose to be less than a nobody. This might seem like a foolish choice, but Paul was no fool. He knew what would come to him, but more importantly, he knew Jesus. Paul might lose even his life on earth, but he could be certain that Jesus would keep his soul safe for eternal life in heaven. If we want to go to heaven too, we must have this same confidence in our Savior. Service to God will cost us a lot of things on earth that the world finds very appealing. Satan makes those things seem like an awful lot to give up. When we're tempted to go back into the world, or even just to dip our toes in the water a little bit, this verse is what we need to be thinking about. If we abandon the pleasures of the flesh, do we really believe that Jesus is going to reward us for it? If we endure suffering and even persecution for His sake, do we believe that we will be repaid? Without that faith, we will never make the right decision, but with it, on that day, we will see the blessing of our Lord.

That's why Paul wanted to see Timothy **HOLDING FAST THE PATTERN**. Consider his words in 2 Timothy 1:13-14. To me, it's fascinating the way that Paul describes the gospel. It's not just a blob of unconnected sayings or neat thoughts. Instead, once we take the sound words and put them together, they form a pattern, a pattern for our churches and a pattern for our lives. It's not up to us to alter this pattern. It's not up to us to "improve" it in some way. Instead, our responsibility is to hold fast to it. We take the sound words of the Scripture, and we follow them in every aspect of our lives. This pattern of the gospel is what Paul is referring to when he mentions that which has been committed to Timothy. This is actually very similar language to the idea of guarding the trust from 1 Timothy 6. Timothy is to keep it and take care of it, and he is to accomplish that through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the inspired teaching of the Holy Spirit is to influence and control him so that he can accomplish God's will in safeguarding it. This must remind us that the Bible is neither just to be taught nor just to be lived. Instead, it is for teaching and living both. If we fail to live it, we will soon be unable to teach it, and if we fail to teach it, soon we will be unable to live it.

As important as this pattern of obedience leading even to suffering was, it generated **TWO REACTIONS** when it appeared in the life of Paul. Paul describes these in 2 Timothy 1:15-18. Some Christians saw the suffering that Paul was undergoing and decided that they wanted nothing to do with it or him. After all, Paul was a lightning rod for persecution, and people who associated with him were likely to be persecuted as well. However, that wasn't the attitude of Onesiphorus. He faithfully served Paul in Ephesus, and when Paul was imprisoned in Rome, he actually went looking for him and helped him in his imprisonment however he could. We must share in the heart of Onesiphorus.