

OpenTheo

2 Timothy: Chapter-by-Chapter Commentary

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Transcript

2 Timothy was likely the last of the pastoral epistles to be written. It is also one of Paul's prison epistles, quite likely written during his imprisonment in Rome, described in Acts 28, in the early 60s AD. It is the second letter to Timothy, who here he describes as his beloved child.

Timothy functioned as Paul's sheliach, his apostolic emissary. Functioning as Paul's son, Timothy could represent Paul in various situations. We see Timothy functioning in this way in Corinth and also in Ephesus, for instance.

Paul had first encountered Timothy during his second missionary journey. Timothy is

introduced to us in the text of Acts, in Acts 16, verses 1-3. Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra.

A disciple was there named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

Paul's introduction to the epistle of 2 Timothy is fairly typical. He begins by introducing himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus, and refers to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus. By this life he probably means what he speaks of in Titus 1, verses 2 and 3, in hope of eternal life which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began, and at the proper time manifested in his word, through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Saviour.

Verses 3-5 constitute a single sentence, and it's not immediately clear how the clauses hang together. Does Paul, for instance, explain the reason for his thankfulness? Looking more closely at Paul's statement, we can follow the logic as it works through. First of all, he expresses his giving of thanks.

Such expressions of thankfulness are a common feature of the openings of Pauline epistles. Subordinate to this expression of thankfulness, he speaks of the way that he serves the Lord in common with his ancestors. Then, he describes the occasion for his giving thanks, as he remembers Timothy constantly in his prayers night and day.

He fills this out, talking about the tears of Timothy that he remembers, perhaps the tears of a painful parting. Remembering those tears, he longs for a reunion, a reunion that would be a great cause of joy to him. In verse 5, we come to the reason for Paul's thanksgiving, which is his remembrance of Timothy's sincere faith.

Paul had begun his statement by speaking of the commonality that he had with his ancestors, in his service of God with a clear conscience. And in verse 5, he also describes the way that Timothy stands in a family line of faith. Perhaps in this case, in contrast with Paul's description of himself, not just a faith that straddles the divide with the old and new covenant, but a faith that is explicitly a new covenant faith.

Gerald Bray argues that given the fact that women married so young within the ancient world, Timothy's grandmother Lois could well have been no more than 40 when Timothy was born. It is quite conceivable that she could have come to faith before Timothy's mother, and that they both could have taught Timothy in the Christian faith from his early to mid childhood. However, given the fact that in 2 Timothy chapter 3 verses 14 to 15 we read, But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in

Christ Jesus.

It is possible that Paul is referring here, not to new covenant Christian faith, but to the faith of a devout Jew. In Acts chapter 16 verse 1, we learn that Eunice was a believing Jewish woman. Timothy, like Paul, stood in a line of believing people, and one of the things that Paul is doing here is reminding him to continue in that tradition, to take those lessons that he learned from his mother and his grandmother, and to run with them himself.

Paul has earlier spoken of Timothy as his child in the faith, and in verse 6 he reminds Timothy of the role that he himself has played in Timothy's spiritual formation. It was through the laying on of Paul's hands that Timothy received what he calls here the gift of God. Elsewhere in 1 Timothy chapter 4 verse 14, we have another account of hands being laid upon Timothy.

Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy, when the council of elders laid their hands on you. This verse raises a number of questions. Is it referring to the same or some different event from that described in verse 6 here? Also, what is the gift in view? Is this the gift of the Holy Spirit more generally? Is it the gift of a particular vocation, or is something else in view? My inclination is to see these as two different events.

1 Timothy chapter 4 verse 14 relates more to Timothy's vocation in the context of the church at Ephesus. The verse here concerns Timothy's role as Paul's shaliach, his apostolic emissary. My suspicion is that the gift of God being referred to in both cases is the gift of the Holy Spirit for that particular form of ministry.

In both cases, Timothy is charged to fan into flame or not to neglect the gift that he has been given. The gift is something that has to be exercised responsibly. There's a danger of quenching the spirit that has been given to us.

Paul's description in verse 6 makes us think of tending to a lamp to ensure that it does not go out. We might also remember the image of Pentecost with the divided tongues of flame descending upon the disciples. This gift of the Holy Spirit is not to be taken for granted.

There is always the danger of grieving the Holy Spirit as a flame needs to be given fuel in order to continue to burn. So the gift of the spirit needs to be given the fuel of actual service and activity. And perhaps above all else, the person exercising this gift needs to return to its source again and again.

God is the one who ultimately gives the spirit and the person who has the gift of the spirit that they are tending to will constantly return to God in prayer. In verse 7, Paul describes the manner of the spirit that has been given to Timothy. A spirit not of fear but

of power and love and self-control.

We might remember statements like Romans chapter 8 verse 15. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry Abba Father. We might also think of the way that Moses charged Joshua his successor in places like Joshua chapter 1 verse 9. Have I not commanded you be strong and courageous? Do not be frightened and do not be dismayed for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

Timothy, perhaps struggling with timidity, needs to be reminded of the character of the spirit of God. A spirit of God that gives even the weak power, that burns with a divine love and delivers us from the bondage of the flesh enabling us to exercise self-control. Living by this spirit, Timothy will find resources that he lacks in his own human flesh.

It is to the power of the spirit that he must look for the resources that he needs to perform his ministry. Paul isn't encouraging Timothy to develop his own internal virtue here so much as to receive a gift that God has given him and to live in terms of that gift. A gift that empowers him to act in ways that he would not be able to by the natural human capacity of his flesh.

In contrast to a spirit of fear is boldness and not being ashamed of the testimony that he has. Acting in the power of the spirit, Timothy will be able to boast in the sufferings of Christ and in the sufferings of his servant Paul. He will be able to share in such sufferings himself.

While the surrounding society which glorified a false form of power would look down on this and see it as pitiable, Timothy would know the power of God in it. Just as his master Christ was crucified in weakness but lives by the power of God, so Timothy, living by the spirit of Christ, will be able to know power even in his weakness and suffering. Although Paul isn't identifying the gospel with the power of God here, some readers might still discern slight echoes of Paul's statement in Romans 1.16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Verses 9-10 are another one of Paul's dense statements of the gospel message. Philip Towner observes that there are a series of pairs and contrasts. The first is a pairing, saved us and called us.

Then there's a contrast, not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace. The next pairing is one to do with time. The grace was given in Christ Jesus before the ages began.

The grace has now been manifested through the appearing of our saviour Christ Jesus. The final pairing concerns the nature of his salvation. He abolished death.

He brought life and immortality to light. Once again, Paul is highlighting that the initiative for salvation is found in God's action, not in ours. And this initiative is one that dates back from before the ages began.

It's something that's grounded in Christ, not in us. God's purpose before the creation began was to form a people in his son. Now, in the fullness of time, with the revelation of Christ in the gospel, that purpose is coming to pass.

Many might see here a reference to the election of particular individuals, but I think that would be to miss the redemptive historical force of Paul's point. What has really been elected is Christ. The fulfillment of this purpose is not the salvation of detached individuals so much as the formation of the people of the church in Christ.

From this eternal divine purpose, Paul draws a straight line to his own ministry. He was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of this. And he suffers for this reason.

He is not ashamed, whatever men may think of him. He is serving the God of the universe, and he can stand before him on that great day, accepted and blessed in Christ. He also enjoys a confidence in his labors.

A great ministry has been committed to him. And Paul knows that despite the limitations of his own powers, his master who committed that charge to him can guard the converts that have been converted through his ministry, and the churches that have been founded by him. When thinking about Paul's ministry, we can focus upon his preaching and traveling, if we're thinking about the book of Acts, or we can think about his letter writing, if we look at the epistles.

But when we look at the beginning of the epistles particularly, and at the end, we get a sense of Paul's ministry as one of prayer for the churches. He constantly commits the churches that he is serving, and his brothers and sisters and fellow ministers, to the charge of the Lord, trusting him to complete in them what he had started. In Philippians chapter 1 verse 6, we have a window into this.

Paul has entrusted things to Timothy. He has given him a pattern of sound words, a model of teaching that Timothy is to follow, something that was communicated in a pattern of life, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus, and with the gift of the Holy Spirit that empowers the entire mission. Having encouraged Timothy in these various ways, Paul ends by giving him some cautionary examples.

A number of people formerly associated with Paul had now abandoned him. The reference to all who are in Asia is probably not a reference to every one of the Christians in the Roman province of Asia, nor is it a reference to all of the church leaders even, but rather presumably to Paul's former associates. Paul is left without anyone that he can trust in the region.

Recognizing the way that people can fail or fall away, should encourage Timothy to steel himself all the more for the times of testing. As one of the few remaining associates of Paul, he needs to learn from the example of those who have failed in that regard. Against the backdrop of these disheartening betrayals and abandonments, Paul presents the example of Anesiphorus as akin to a light in his very dark place.

Even when Paul was in prison, Anesiphorus was not ashamed to be associated with him. Indeed, he went out of his way to seek him out. The example of such a man is definitely one to follow.

A question to consider, what are some of the ways in which we can fan into flame the gift of the Holy Spirit within us? From the cautionary examples of those who had abandoned him, and the positive example of Anesiphorus and his household, Paul turns to address Timothy more directly. Relying upon the empowering grace of Christ, Timothy needs to teach what he has learned from Paul to others in his turn. Paul's statement in verse 2 should draw our minds back to chapter 1 verses 13 and 14.

Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you. The deposit that Timothy was told to guard in the preceding chapter is now one that he is instructed to entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others in their turn.

For Paul, it is very important that things get passed on. The concern here is not one of apostolic succession, so much as this is a concern of preserving the apostolic faith, maintaining it by a healthy process of tradition, handing it on to a new generation in its turn, to people who are equipped to continue that process. Employing a military metaphor, Paul charges Timothy to courageously face and endure suffering.

He is to be a good soldier of Christ Jesus. We might think here of the language of putting on the whole armor of God in Ephesians chapter 6. The Christian is a soldier fighting a battle. The stakes are life and death, and loyalty, courage and struggle are non-negotiable.

Developing the military metaphor, in verses 4 to 6, Paul gives three different examples of vocations that provide analogies for the Christian faith. The soldier, the athlete and the farmer are all different sorts of examples of diligence and hard work in pursuit of a particular goal with the promise of a reward. Paul notes the single-mindedness of the soldier.

He does not get entangled in civilian pursuits. He is there to fight a battle and to be loyal to his commander. More than anything else, he seeks to please the one who enlisted him.

In Paul's use of the analogy here, the one who enlisted the Christian is Christ Jesus himself. Whatever we do, we must do in order to please him. Paul also uses the analogy of the soldier in 1 Corinthians 9. Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? The example of the athlete is one that Paul uses later on in that chapter in 1 Corinthians, in verses 24 to 25.

The athlete competes and struggles for the sake of a reward. However, to obtain this reward, he needs to compete according to the rules. The final example that Paul gives is the hard-working farmer.

The soldier is singled out by his aim to please the one who enlisted him, the athlete by his competing according to the rules. And the hard-working farmer by the reward that he receives. Each of these illustrations allows Paul to pick out a particular facet of the Christian's vocation.

Paul wants Timothy to meditate upon his statements at this point, believing that he will receive greater insight as he does so. Each of the metaphors in question occur on a number of occasions within Paul's writing. For instance, the athletic metaphor can also be seen in Philippians chapter 3, verses 12 to 14.

Verses 8 to 10 are a single sentence. Once again, Paul's concern here is that Timothy get his bearings. He needs to remember Jesus Christ, and from taking his bearings by reflecting upon Christ, he will have a clearer idea of how he ought to behave.

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, the offspring of David. This pairing might remind us of Romans chapter 1, verses 3 to 4, concerning his son who was descended from David according to the flesh, and was declared to be the son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness, by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord. As the one risen from the dead, Jesus has been vindicated, he has been elevated by God, he is the offspring of David, he is the true Messiah.

These are absolutely staple truths of Paul's gospel, and he is suffering for this, not just with physical lack, but also with the social shame that comes with being a bound criminal. Yet Paul's physical condition of imprisonment could not contrast more with the condition of the word of God. The word of God is not bound, it cannot be shackled, and as a result, Paul is confident as he undergoes suffering for the sake of it.

In Philippians chapter 1, for instance, Paul can speak of his situation of imprisonment in a manner that expresses his wonder at the way that the Lord has used his situation to advance his own kingdom purposes. Paul will willingly undergo such suffering for the sake of the elect. By the elect here, he is referring to the church of Jesus Christ.

His concern is that the riches of Christ be given to his people, and that his people be led

through the trials and struggles of this age, through the shepherding that Paul and others provide, to obtain the fullness of the reward that the Lord has set apart for them. To underline his point, he refers to a fourfold affirmation. If we have died with him, we will also live with him.

If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we deny him, he also will deny us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.

The first statement concerning dying and then living with Christ might recall Romans chapter 6 verse 8. Now, if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. The Christian's identification with Christ and his death, in Romans chapter 6, connected with baptism, is a source of assurance of future resurrection, a truth that will be important in attacking the error that Paul later speaks of. This shouldn't be seen as just a once-off event, back in the time of people's baptism.

It should be seen as an ongoing participation. There was a definitive death with Christ, which must continually be lived out in the believer's life. Likewise, there is an anticipated event of future resurrection, of living with him, but also an ongoing participation in the reality-filled promise and guarantee of that by the Holy Spirit, which has been given to us as a down payment.

In the present, we must endure sufferance, confident that if we do so, we will attain what we have been promised. We will reign with him. We might here recall Paul's charges to Timothy in verses 3 to 6. Those who disown Christ will be disowned by Christ.

True disciples must deny themselves and follow Christ, and as they deny themselves and acknowledge Christ, they will be acknowledged by Christ on the last day, Luke chapter 9 verses 23 to 26. And he said to all, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. After the relative symmetry of the first three statements, Paul's fourth statement might surprise us. There are various ways that people have taken this statement.

Some have taken it as a statement that Christ will save even those who waver in faith. Others that Christ is faithful in his punishing of those who are faithless. However, I don't think that Paul is making either of these claims at this point.

Rather, his point is that everything is founded ultimately upon the faithfulness of God, not upon the faithfulness of the people of God. Even when human beings prove faithless, God is still going to work out his purposes faithfully. He will keep his promises.

He will uphold his covenant. None of this ultimately rests upon our faithfulness. And on the occasions when we have proved faithless, it is to this faithfulness of God that we should flee.

We might think perhaps of 1 John 1 verse 9. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. It was the faithfulness of God that Moses appealed to in Exodus chapter 32 to 34 when he interceded for Israel after their sin with the golden calf. For the Lord to abandon his faithfulness would be for the Lord to abandon his very nature.

He cannot deny himself. This should be the greatest source of comfort for those who are penitent. Paul is concerned that Timothy and others around him are able to deal effectively with false teaching in their midst.

The false teachers are particularly fond of quarrels. Their teaching leads to conflict and division. They are unteachable and resist correction.

Blind to the true substance of the faith, they are preoccupied with quarrelling about words to the detriment of all of their hearers. The way of the false teachers is driven by pride, by desire for the praise of men and for a following around themselves. Timothy, by contrast, should seek above all else the praise of the Lord.

He should desire to be recognized as a faithful servant, a worker who does not need to be ashamed. And his business is with the word of truth, which he must handle with care. Discerning true and false words and edifying and unedifying speech is the business of someone like Timothy.

He must be alert to the way that false teachers and their speech impact those who hear them. He must perceive specific types of discourse and the way that they have particular tendencies. For instance, the irreverent babble of such as Hymenaeus and Violetus and the way that it can spread through a community like Gangrene.

This Hymenaeus is probably referred to in 1 Timothy 1 verses 18-20. This charge I entrust to you, Timothy my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

The exact nature of their teaching is not clear. Paul says that they are saying that the resurrection has already happened. Their over-realized eschatology has been connected by some to a sort of Gnosticism.

As Christians are baptized into Christ, for instance, they obtain the resurrection of Christ here and now. Or perhaps the teaching is based in Christ's own resurrection, believing

that Christ's resurrection has precipitated the arrival of the age to come, and we already participate in that. Or perhaps the teaching is a greatly over-realized version of something similar to what Paul is teaching.

In the life of the church now, we are participating in the resurrection life of Christ. In baptism we were raised with him, and now we are living by the life of the resurrection spirit. We're not awaiting some future event, it's already happened.

Now of course, Paul does teach that we participate in the resurrection spirit, that we have already in some sense been raised with Christ. However, Paul has a very strong already-not-yet framework for understanding these things. We still await this salvation to be realized in its fullness in the future.

There is still a final resurrection, and if we only have hope in this life, we are of all people the most pitiable. All of this is unsettling a number of people within the church, and perhaps Timothy is also somewhat rattled when he sees the apparent success that the false teaching is having in these congregations. In the face of this widespread faithlessness, Paul wants to remind Timothy of the Lord's faithfulness.

The sure foundation of God is not our faith, but his faithfulness. The language of the foundation might be an allusion back to Isaiah chapter 28, verse 16. Therefore thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone of a sure foundation.

Whoever believes will not be in haste. This verse is read in a messianic way by Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament. Paul here argues that it has a seal, something that validates the one who laid it.

The Lord knows those who are his, and Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity. The Lord is building his house upon this foundation, and this basis remains sure when we see people we once presumed to be Christians, who have fallen away, we should not lose our nerve. We should return once more to the foundation and take our bearings from that.

The statement, the Lord knows those who are his, might be an allusion back to a key narrative in Numbers chapter 16, in verse 4-5 of that chapter. When Moses heard it, he fell on his face, and he said to Korah and all his company, In the morning the Lord will show who is his, and who is holy, and will bring him near to him. The one whom he chooses he will bring near to him.

And then later on in that chapter, in verse 26, And he spoke to the congregation, saying, Depart, please, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest you be swept away with all their sins. Perhaps in a manner comparable to that of the false teachers here, with Hymenaeus and Philetus and others like them, in Numbers, Moses

and Aaron were challenged by Korah and his company, and the Lord made a great division in his people, destroying Korah and all who were with him. Recognizing the sort of divisions made by the Lord, the faithful servant of the Lord must be concerned to cleanse himself, so that he will be useful to the master, ready for every good work.

The church here is spoken of as a great house, and perhaps Paul's point is that just as in a great house there are noble vessels that are put up on the shelf and honoured and treated as items of great value, while there are also other vessels that are used for common use, that aren't respected at all, and will soon be disposed of as they are broken or used. So the church is a place with a mixed company, with vessels of honour set apart for the master's special purpose, and then dishonourable vessels like the false teachers that will be discarded with the recycling. As those within this house, it is imperative that we seek to be members of the former company.

We will be members of this group as we cleanse ourselves, and as Paul highlights in verse 22, as we flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace. The youthful passions here are probably not primarily sexual passions, more likely it's the passions of pride and anger that animate the false teachers. The faithful teacher approaches his task very differently from the false ones.

He is irenic, he is not someone who is seeking to cause fights. He is kind and considerate of others, seeking to understand where they are coming from and to speak carefully into their situations. He is able to teach, he knows how to instruct and to persuade people in a way that they are receptive to.

He is patient in enduring evil. Any leader will face lots of opposition. A good leader will not make the opposition about him.

The good leader can endure unreasonable treatment aimed at himself without being blown off course. When people attack him, he draws attention to Christ. He corrects opponents with gentleness.

He does not respond in kind to the treatment that he receives. All of this requires considerable self-mastery. It requires being detached enough from other people that you are not in constant reactive engagement with them.

The good teacher is engaged with people without being constantly entangled and enmeshed with them. Such a teacher is the most apt person to lead others to repentance. He is not trying to win a fight.

He is not driven by pride and wanting to get one up upon the other person. Rather, he is wanting to win the person to the truth. And his greatest hope is that the Lord would grant them repentance, that they would come to their senses, and that the devil would be thwarted in his plans and robbed of his servants.

A question to consider. What are some of the practices of the faithful leader that would equip him to behave in the way that Paul describes here? In 2 Timothy chapter 2, Paul had instructed Timothy concerning how he should address the problem of the false teachers. Now in chapter 3, he presents the false teachers within an eschatological framework.

They are living in the last days. The old covenant is about to come down in a few years' time with the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. And in this time between the times introduced by Christ's death, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost, the world order is being radically shaken.

And the shaking is increasing as they reach the end of this period, especially around the time that this letter is written, in the 60s AD. Teaching concerning false teachers in such an eschatological framework is something that we see on a number of occasions within the New Testament, in places like 2 Peter and Jude, for instance. Also in 1 Timothy chapter 4, verses 1 to 3, Paul had made a similar point.

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times, some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus had made similar claims, Matthew chapter 24, verses 9 to 13. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.

And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another, and many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold, but the one who endures to the end will be saved. In this epistle, we get a sense of Paul's own experience bearing this out.

He's been abandoned by a great many in Asia, and in the following chapter we read of people like Demas, whose faith has been abandoned for the sake of the world. As the eschatological horizon approaches, it is clear that they are living in perilous times. Wickedness has a freer reign and is expressing itself in more intense forms.

Paul provides a lengthy vice list, characterizing some of the people that are arising in these times. We might compare such a list to that which we find in Romans chapter 1 verses 29 to 31. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice.

They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. As in Romans chapter 1, the list here plays with particular sounds.

From disobedient to parents to not loving good, all of the words begin with the letter alpha, save for the term slanderous. As a list, it moves smoothly from the tongue and lodges in the ear. The characterization begins with the disordered loves of these people.

They love self and money. As Paul had noted in 1 Timothy chapter 6, the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. From their disordered loves, Paul proceeds to their pride and boastfulness.

From these traits, a torrent of sinful behavior flows forth. In the list that Paul gives, we get a sense that these people are characterized by virtually every single kind of sin. They are cruel and implacable.

They are opposed to reconciliation. They slander. They cannot control themselves and are like brute beasts.

They have no love for what is good. They are impulsive and impetuous. They betray those that would rely upon them.

They are self-important, filled with ungodliness, and utterly devoid of the gratitude that should be a distinguishing feature of the people of God. Verse 4 concludes by characterizing them as lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, perhaps hearkening back to the beginning of the list in verse 2, where they are described as lovers of self. Surprisingly, at the beginning of verse 5, they are described as having the appearance of godliness.

Despite all of these vices, these persons are maintaining a facade of righteousness, and many around them seem to be taken in by them. Timothy, however, needs to recognize such people. He needs to have a sense of where they fit into the eschatological framework, and he needs to be careful to avoid them.

The last days are a time of great testing. In the times of testing, the hearts of people can be revealed, and the false teachers in their teaching are one form that this testing can take. These false teachers, Timothy's opponents, seem to be having success in certain contexts, particularly with some foolish and spiritually compromised women.

We might get a sense of the dynamics by which such false teachings spread in other parts of the pastoral epistles. In Titus chapter 1, verse 11, they must be silenced since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. The false teachers, like the serpent with Eve, seem to be focusing upon uninformed women as the weakest link.

Through leading astray such women, the women spread the false teaching, and whole communities can become compromised. Perhaps such a spread of the false teaching is also seen in a place like 1 Timothy chapter 5, verse 13. Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and

busybodies, saying what they should not.

The women described here are burdened with sins and led astray by various passions. In Paul's understanding, it is their sinfulness that makes them susceptible to the false teaching. Perhaps what they are looking for is teaching that flatters their desires, and the false teachers, as they are doing this for money, are only too happy to flatter the desires of their hearers.

They will likely be paid far more handsomely as a result. There will always be a market for teachers who tickle their hearers' ears. However, such women are doomed to futility in their quest for the truth.

As they have no appetite for the truth, their appetites lead them astray, moving them away from the truth, rather than closer toward it. Likewise, if they are seeking to learn from these false teachers, they are doomed to continued and increasing ignorance. The false teachers have nothing true to share with them.

Indeed, further time spent at their feet will only result in the hearers taking on some of the manifold vices of the teachers. Paul compares these false teachers to Jannes and Jambres, names that the tradition had given to key magicians that had stood against Moses and Aaron from Pharaoh's court. Just as the magicians had not stood long or successfully against Moses and Aaron, so these teachers will be shown up, revealed in their true character.

It will only be a matter of time before their folly is revealed to everyone. In contrast to such false teachers, infected as they are with many vices, Timothy needs to devote himself to a very different pattern of behaviour, and he will learn that pattern from Paul. Paul lists a number of different ways in which he provides an example.

In his teaching, he provides a model of setting forth the truth, forthrightly, powerfully, with integrity and with clarity. Paul's behaviour, his commitment and his devotion in his life, his Christian virtues of faith, patience, love and steadfastness, all provide patterns for Timothy. Paul has described Timothy as his son in the faith.

As a son, Timothy is to follow the pattern of his father. In 1 Corinthians 4, verse 17, we see Timothy described in a way that suggests that he has done this. That is why I sent you, Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere, in every church.

In verses 11 and 12, we see that Paul especially wants to spotlight persecutions and sufferings. Suffering has been a continued theme within the second epistle to Timothy. We see it in chapter 1, verses 11 and 12.

Also in chapter 2, verse 3. In verses 8 to 10 of that chapter. As preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal, but the word of God is not

bound. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

Timothy was already well aware of Paul's sufferings. As Paul mentions here, Timothy had followed them. He had met Paul during the second missionary journey at Lystra and Iconium, which helps to explain why Paul mentions the suffering that he experienced in those places here.

Such suffering is what should be expected by all those who follow Christ. The world, the flesh and the devil are set against them and they will have to struggle against all of these forces. There is an antagonism between light and darkness, between this age and the age to come.

At the end of verse 11, Paul might be alluding to Psalm 34, verses 17 to 19. When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their trouble. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. Paul warns Timothy that the evils and the opposition that they face will only increase as the eschatological horizon nears. They are living in the last days and as a result they should not be surprised to find lawlessness abounding.

In such a situation, Timothy needs to dig in, he needs to re-entrench himself within the things that he already knows. He needs to remind himself of the old lessons and he needs to draw from his deepest roots. He was taught in the Christian faith by his mother and his grandmother.

Keeping them in mind and the example of the apostle who had been like a father to him, he must steel himself for the coming struggle. As Paul is seeing so many people falling away, being picked off or otherwise failing in this hour of crisis, he is concerned to encourage Timothy to exercise boldness as he faces the future. Now is the time when Timothy's true mettle will be proved.

The apostle especially singles out the scriptures as that which Timothy must ground himself in. Timothy has learned the scriptures, the Old Testament scriptures, from his early childhood and it is these scriptures that prepare one to exercise faith in Christ. In a theologically important statement, Paul expresses the usefulness of the scriptures for Timothy's task.

The scriptures are described as breathed out by God, all one word in the Greek. This is why we talk about inspiration. The concept here also connects the scriptures closely with the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1 verse 21 expresses a similar point. The meaning of the statement is not entirely clear. It could be read all scripture, referring to the whole body of the scriptures,

or it could be read as every scripture, each individual text or passage.

Scholars also debate whether we should understand it as saying that every scripture is inspired by God and useful, or that every scripture that is inspired by God is also useful. It seems to me that on balance it is more likely that we should understand this as every scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness. The reference is not to scripture as a whole body.

The scriptures were spoken of in the preceding verse in a plural form. Here it is singular, which suggests to me that it is more likely to be referring to individual scriptures. Each and every scripture is inspired and therefore profitable.

And each inspired scripture and the inspired scriptures as a whole prepare the man of God, the Christian minister, for all the work that he needs to do, for teaching, the task of elucidating the truth and instruction within it, for reproof, for addressing the false teachers and opponents, for correction, for exposing and revealing their errors, and for training in righteousness. Besides the inspiration of scripture, a further thing that the final verses of this chapter bring out is the sufficiency of the scripture. It is the scripture that enables the man of God to be complete and to be equipped for every good work.

In the scripture, all the instruction that we need to serve God faithfully has been given to us. A question to consider. What other statements in scripture can help us in developing a doctrine of scripture? The final chapter of 2nd Timothy, and likely the final chapter of Paul's corpus, begins with a solemn charge from the apostle.

Timothy has on previous occasions been addressed or charged in the company of many witnesses. Here Paul charges him in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, in terms of the eschatological horizon of Christ's coming in judgment. He speaks of this event in three terms, judgment of the living and the dead, his appearing, and his kingdom.

Each of these terms brings out a particular facet of the event that Paul is looking forward to, and in terms of which he wants Timothy to act. These realities are imminent. The judgment of the world has already been set in motion by the death and resurrection of Christ, and with AD 70 on the horizon, the establishment of the kingdom and the judgment of this world is very near at hand.

This has the effect of intensifying the sense of the urgency of Paul's charge to Timothy. The charge has a moral urgency, but it also has an eschatological urgency. The time is short and the judge is at the door.

Timothy in this situation must preach the word. He needs to be a faithful servant of the message of the gospel, declaring it boldly. He must take every opportunity that is granted to him, always being prepared to seize such opportunities when they present themselves.

He must be ready in season and out of season. Many commentators have taken this expression as referring to the way that Timothy must take the opportunities whether or not they are convenient to him. However, Philip Towner suggests that a background in the philosophical discourse of the time makes more sense of the statement here.

Philosophers spoke, for instance, about the importance of taking the right moment to speak particular truth, so as to be most likely to receive a favourable reception. The problem is that when the time is short, you do not have such a luxury. Truth must be presented urgently and persistently, not merely when the time seems most propitious for it.

Paul, in essence, seems to be saying, don't wait for the perfect moment and as a result find that all opportunity has passed you by. He must convict people with the truth. He must challenge false teachers and opponents in a more disciplinary sense.

He needs to exhort, encourage and teach, to provide people with instruction that moves them towards the truth and righteous behaviour. And in all of this he has to act with patience and forbearance, with composure and mastery over his temper. Much of what Paul is doing in this charge is reinforcing points that he has made previously in the letter, for instance in chapter 2 verses 24-25.

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. Besides the gravity of the eschatological frame within which Paul has presented Timothy's vocation, he also wants Timothy to recognise the urgency of the present time, as people are about to be desensitised to and drift away from the truth. A widespread rejection of the truth is on the horizon.

This will occur as people become impatient with and intolerant of the truth and its teachers. It will become unpleasant, tiresome, boring, unpalatable and burdensome to them, and they will turn away from it. Along with this will come an appetite for falsehood that will drive a quest for teachers who will satisfy it.

Paul describes this with the colourful metaphor of itching ears. People who reject the truth in this way will accumulate false teachers. Paul has described some of these movements already in 2 Timothy 3 verses 6-7.

For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning, and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. As this movement away from the truth occurs, people will wander off into myths. Elsewhere in the pastoral epistles, Paul has warned against the impact of myths, the way that empty speculations and groundless fables and esoteric doctrines all distract and detract from the clarity of the truth in the gospel.

Such false teachings are perhaps attractive precisely because they do not have a practical bite to them. They flatter people that they are particularly illuminated, that they have a peculiar insight into reality, but they do not speak with any moral force into people's lives. Faced with the rising tide of such false teaching and false teachers, Timothy's faithfulness in his charge is all the more imperative.

He needs to be sober-minded, a person who is alert and serious, who recognizes the gravity of the issues that he is dealing with and acts accordingly. Once again, as he has done on several occasions in this epistle, Paul charges Timothy to endure suffering. In the days to come his mettle will be tested, and he needs to come through proven and faithful.

Timothy must do the work of an evangelist. The exact nature of the evangelist's duties is not entirely clear. The role of the evangelist is mentioned alongside others in Ephesians chapter 4 verses 11 and 12, and he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

Philip was an example of an evangelist in the book of Acts. It is possible that the role of the evangelist is particularly defined by itinerancy. Persons like Philip travelled from place to place, they were not just pastors in a single location, nor for that matter were the apostles like the Twelve or like Paul.

Perhaps the role of the evangelist was an early church role that mediated between the apostles and then figures like the overseers and the elders. The book of 2 Timothy is so important because the times are perilous. Paul's apostolic ministry is reaching its end, he knows that he is about to die.

False teachers are on the rise, former workers for Christ are deserting their posts, and pastors seem to be falling back dismayed. Paul himself has experienced widespread personal rejection, and persons he once depended upon have let him down. Faithful and trustworthy ministers are spread thin on the ground.

If there were ever a time when faithful and committed ministers were absolutely essential, it was that time. Paul speaks of his own situation, he is already in the process of being poured out as a drink offering. What exactly Paul means by speaking of himself as an oblation is not entirely clear.

Perhaps the sacrifice is that of Christ and he is being poured out upon that sacrifice. Elsewhere he uses similar imagery in a different context. Philippians chapter 2 verse 17.

Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. There, the sacrifice that Paul is being poured out upon is the sacrifice of the Philippians faith and we might presume that the pouring out refers

to his death. In this passage in 2 Timothy, the pouring out is not directly identified with the death itself, but seems to be connected with it more generally.

The pouring out is the extended process that leads up to and is concluded in the death. This is another example of Paul's understanding of Christian service and ministry within a conceptual framework offered by sacrifice. He shifts in verse 7 to a familiar imagery of athletic endeavour.

He has fought the good fight. Paul might be referring to military imagery here or he might be working with the athletic metaphor. He presents the Christian life and the task of ministry as like a race that he has run.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 9 verses 24 to 27 he wrote. Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things.

They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air, but I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. Another instance of an athletic metaphor can be found in Philippians chapter 3 verses 12 to 14.

Not that I have already obtained this, or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Here too Paul presents the faithful running of the race that was set before him as one with a great reward, the crown of righteousness, a reward that will be granted to all faithful servants who look for Christ's appearing.

Paul has described Timothy as his son, as one who follows his example as a son would follow his father's example. Presenting his own faithfulness in running the course of Christian ministry, Paul wants to give Timothy something to follow. He also wants Timothy to recognise that he needs to fill the shoes of Paul as Paul leaves the scene.

The charge that Paul is giving to Timothy here has many of the same elements as those in Hebrews chapter 12 verses 1 and 2. Therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Those who faithfully run this race are surrounded by many others that have done so before them. Paul is like a relay runner, finishing his leg, shouting a word of encouragement to the man to whom he has passed his baton.

The remainder of the chapter that mostly contains personal instructions gives a tantalising window into the final chapter of the Apostle's life. Asking Timothy to come to him soon, Paul speaks of the way that he has been deserted and abandoned by some, of how he has been cut off from others as they have gone to different locations, and of the great testing that he has undergone in others' absence. Demas was a Gentile fellow-worker of Paul, who is mentioned in Colossians chapter 4 verse 14.

After having read of Demas as a faithful companion of Paul in other books, we might be horrified to discover that he abandoned Paul in such a serious manner. Such love of the present age is described in 1 John chapter 2 verse 15. Paul's judgement of Demas' motives is sobering, especially considering that this is the last biblical reference to him.

In contrast to Demas, Crescens and Titus had likely not abandoned Paul, but they had gone to other locations, depriving Paul of their company and assistance. Only Luke remained with Paul at that point. For much of the end of the book of Acts, Luke had accompanied Paul in his travels, and it seems that he remained with Paul at this point in Rome.

If the reference to Demas in verse 10 is a saddening reference to a once faithful and stalwart companion of Paul, who had fallen back and backslidden, the reference to Mark in verse 11 has something of the opposite character. Paul had refused to take John Mark as a companion on his second missionary journey, not trusting him to stay the course. In Acts chapter 15 verses 37 to 40 we read of this episode.

Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark, but Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.

But Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. Now in the final period of his life, the best part of two decades after that original confrontation with Barnabas, Paul sees the value of having Mark by his side. Just as those who are once faithful can fall back like Demas, those who once fell back can prove faithful, like Mark.

Paul has sent Tychicus to Ephesus, perhaps he is the one bearing this epistle to Timothy. Tychicus was also the bearer of the epistles to the Colossians and the Ephesians. On his way to visit Paul, presumably in Rome, from Asia, Paul wants Timothy to pick up the cloak, the parchments and the books that he left behind in Troas.

Towner describes the sort of item that Paul's cloak would have been. This garment was a heavy, circular-shaped cape, made from goat hair, hide or coarse wool, for outer wear and especially important in the winter months. It was not a garment one took lightly, for it would have been relatively expensive, most men owning only one such piece of

clothing, and it doubled as an outer protective covering for sleeping.

A person such as Paul, accustomed to travel and to nights in unpredictable situations, would certainly regard this garment as an essential and typical part of his kit, leading to his request to have it back by winter. Paul was a writer and a student of scripture, and he requests that Timothy bring with him the books and above all the parchments. Considerable scully speculation has been prompted by this instruction, people wondering what exactly Paul had in mind.

Are the books and parchments referring to the same item, the books, namely the parchments? Or are they two different classes of material? Did the parchments refer to Paul's own notebooks? Are the books or scrolls parts of the Old Testament scripture? Are the early church writings maybe Paul's own writings, and perhaps parts of the New Testament scripture? Such questions cannot be finely settled, but they do tantalise. Paul speaks here of a character called Alexander who opposed the message of the gospel. He warns Timothy to beware of him, and he may be the same Alexander as the one mentioned in 1 Timothy 1 verses 19 and 20.

By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme. Verses 16-18 record some of the last reliable biographical details concerning the apostle Paul. His first hearing was likely a hearing in preparation for the trial, to see if there was a case to be heard.

Many historically have taken this not as a hearing, but as a trial itself, Paul being released as a result. There is a long historical tradition of Paul having two periods of imprisonment in Rome, and what Paul describes here would be seen as the end of the first. It is, however, I believe, more likely that this refers to an arraignment or hearing, a difficult event at which no one stood by Paul to offer moral support or evidence to back up his case.

Nevertheless, the Lord was with Paul in this experience and supported him through it. Paul describes this in terms of being rescued from the lion's mouth. Towner makes the intriguing case that this is part of a larger set of allusions to Psalm 22, a psalm in terms of which Paul is describing his experience.

When we consider the importance of Psalm 22 in the context of Christ's crucifixion, this becomes all the more interesting. Towner picks out a number of expressions from the psalm. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? The forsakenness of the sufferer in Psalm 22 is connected with the abandonment of Paul in his defence.

Paul's claim that through the Lord's deliverance of him, the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it, might be an allusion back to the Septuagint of Psalm 22 verses 27-28. All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn

to the Lord, and all the families of the nation shall worship before you. For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.

This reference to the kingship of the Lord is also alluded to in the heavenly kingdom of which Paul speaks in verse 18. For Towner, the principal allusion around which all of these secondary allusions cluster is found in verse 21 of the psalm. Save me from the mouth of the lion.

By presenting his experience in terms of the psalm, Paul is articulating his struggle in terms of the righteous sufferer, and most notably of Christ. Paul's use of several terms relating to deliverance and salvation is also picking up upon the language of the psalm. The final verses conclude with some remaining greetings, instructions and news.

Priscilla and Aquila had worked alongside Paul in Acts chapter 18 and had travelled with him at various points. They had lived in several different locations, Corinth, Rome and Ephesus among them. Anesiphorus had been mentioned back in chapter 1 as one who had shown peculiar faithfulness to Paul.

Paul had there expressed his desire that the Lord would grant his household mercy. Erastus, who may be the same person as mentioned in Romans chapter 16 verse 23, was left behind in Corinth. If he is the same person as mentioned in Romans, he was the city treasurer.

Trophimus, mentioned in Acts chapter 20 verse 4, had accompanied Paul for part of his third missionary journey. Most notably, Trophimus had inadvertently precipitated Paul's capture in Jerusalem, which had led to him being taken to Rome. The Jews believed that Paul had taken Trophimus, a Gentile, into the temple, and as a result he was seized.

Given the considerable danger of travelling during the winter months, Paul wants Timothy to make his way to him as soon as possible, with the possible exception of Linus, who is identified as a Roman bishop within the tradition. The other figures mentioned in verse 21 are not known to us, and are only mentioned here in the New Testament. Paul closes his second epistle to Timothy and his final letter with a personal greeting to Timothy, the Lord be with your spirit, and then a more general greeting to Timothy and his companions, grace be with you.

A question to consider. In verses 3 and 4, Paul describes the process of drifting away from, and then rejecting the truth. What are the stages that we might discern in such a process, and what might be some of the signs that they are occurring?