

Shepherding Notes

2 Timothy

By Marco Rosero

The second epistle to Timothy finds Paul once again in a Roman prison, arrested as part of the persecution of Christians under Nero's reign. This time, Paul is in a cold cell, in chains, with no hope of release, abandoned by those who were once close to him due to fear of persecution, and facing imminent execution.

Aware that his end was near, Paul passes on the mantle of ministry — not just apostolic, but pastoral — to Timothy, urging him to remain faithful in his duties: to hold on to sound doctrine, avoid error, accept persecution, trust the Scriptures, and preach the gospel continually.

Paul's Apostolic Authority

The author identifies himself as Paul, appointed as an apostle not by his own will, but by the will of God. In other words, Paul did not assume this role for himself — as many do today — but was commissioned by the Lord. That is the authority with which he speaks to Timothy, his beloved son in the faith. Timothy was not his biological son, but his disciple; Paul took him under his wing, trained him, and Timothy accompanied him on his missionary journeys as if he were his own son. Paul emphasizes his apostolic authority not only for Timothy's sake, but for all who would read the letter and obey its inspired instructions.

Paul tells Timothy that he remembers him constantly in his prayers. He also mentions the tears Timothy shed for his teacher and mentor — possibly during their last farewell. Additionally, Paul recalls Timothy's genuine faith, a faith that first lived in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. They were devout Jewish women who had a strong understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures and prepared Timothy to receive the Messiah as soon as he heard the gospel.

Fan into Flame

Paul exhorts Timothy to "fan into flame the gift of God." This metaphor refers to keeping a fire burning: when you start a campfire, lighting it is not enough — you must fan it to keep it from going out. In the same way, Timothy was not to neglect the gift God gave him through the laying on of hands — a practice used to ordain someone to ministry. This gift, given by the Holy Spirit, fills the believer with strength, love, and self-control, equipping them to carry out their God-given task.

Based on the power that God imparts at the moment of salvation, Paul commands Timothy not to be ashamed of bearing witness or announcing the good news of salvation. He also tells him not to be ashamed of Paul himself — even though he was imprisoned a second time, in much harsher conditions than the first — but instead to be willing to suffer for Christ's sake.

A Holy Calling

The calling that God gave to Paul and Timothy is a holy calling. John MacArthur explains that this calling involves imputed holiness (justification), imparted holiness (sanctification), and ultimately, glorification. It is not by personal merit, but according to God's eternal purpose, designed before the creation of the world. This grace was revealed through Christ Jesus, who, having taken on human form, became our representative before God, bore our sins, and delivered us from death and condemnation to give us eternal life in His name.

Paul exhorts Timothy to hold fast to the teaching he had received from him — sound doctrine, faith, and love that are in Christ Jesus. He charges him to carefully guard what has been entrusted to him, knowing that the Holy Spirit will help him fulfill this responsibility.

Apparently, many who were with Paul at the time of his arrest abandoned him. He specifically mentions Phygelus and Hermogenes, who may have been ashamed to be associated with him while imprisoned. In contrast, Paul highlights Onesiphorus, who was not ashamed of Paul — but upon arriving in Rome, diligently searched for him and refreshed him. Paul prays that the Lord will reward Onesiphorus with mercy on the Day of Judgment.

"Though suffering and imprisonment brought him hardship, Paul was not ashamed — because he knew God had the power to sustain him until the very end of his life."

Paul encourages Timothy to be strong. Timothy was likely feeling discouraged as he faced false teachers and people trying to undermine his authority in the church. Paul sets a clear standard for protecting and passing on the gospel. He tells Timothy to find faithful men who meet the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 for elders, and urges him to fulfill the task given to him, trusting that Christ will give him strength during hard times.

Three Metaphors for Ministry

To help Timothy understand the importance of endurance, Paul uses three metaphors. First, he compares him to a soldier. A soldier doesn't get distracted by civilian life but stays focused and fully committed, training his body and mind to be ready for battle. Next, Paul compares Christian ministry to an athlete. An athlete must train daily and eat well to be prepared for race day — only through preparation and discipline can he reach the finish line and win the prize. Then, Paul uses the example of a farmer. A farmer doesn't plant a seed and expect fruit the next day; he prepares the soil, plants, fertilizes, removes weeds, and protects the crop from pests. Only after hard work does he see the harvest.

These illustrations remind Timothy to be committed, brave, and diligent. Paul also points to Jesus as the ultimate example. Christ, who descended from David, died, rose again, and now sits at God's right hand — He is our advocate. Paul proclaims this truth even when it brings suffering and imprisonment. The world can try to silence believers, but it can never silence the gospel.

A Trustworthy Saying

In verses 11–13, Paul quotes what may have been an early Christian hymn or confession of faith. It calls believers to courage, endurance, and even martyrdom for Christ. It promises resurrection for those who die with Him and assures that the faithful will reign with Him. It also warns that those who deny Christ will be denied by Him — just as Jesus said in Matthew 10:33. The hymn ends with a comforting truth: even if we are unfaithful, He remains faithful. Our salvation rests not on our perfect faithfulness, but on His.

A Workman Approved by God

Paul tells Timothy to do his job well. He must be diligent and careful because he is serving God, not people. He must handle God's Word accurately and teach it faithfully so that he

will have nothing to be ashamed of. Paul names two false teachers — Hymenaeus and Philetus — who twisted Scripture by teaching that the resurrection had already happened, denying the future bodily resurrection. This false teaching undermines the gospel and denies the believer's final salvation and transformation. Timothy, like any faithful pastor, must warn the church about such dangerous errors.

Even though false teachers try to infiltrate and destroy the church, God's foundation stands firm. The church is the pillar and support of the truth, and not even the gates of hell will overcome it. Paul urges all believers to turn away from sin. Paul compares the church to a large house with various kinds of utensils — some honorable, some dishonorable. A believer's value lies in being clean and ready to serve God. Those who want to be useful to God must separate themselves from impurity, especially from false teachers and corrupt influences. God uses clean, obedient people for good works.

Finally, Paul warns Timothy not to get involved in pointless arguments with false teachers. These only cause conflict. The Lord's servant must not be argumentative, but kind to everyone — even to those who oppose him. He must correct them gently, hoping that God will lead them to repent and know the truth.

"The world can try to silence believers, but it can never silence the gospel. Even when Paul was in chains, the Word of God was not bound."

Paul continues to speak about the false teachers who have caused many problems in the church in Ephesus. He wants Timothy to understand the character of these deceitful people. The phrase "in the last days" refers to the time between Christ's first and second comings — the era we live in. But what does Paul mean when he says dangerous times will come? The characteristics he describes focus not on difficult circumstances, but on evil people. John Calvin said, "We must remember that, from Paul's perspective, the danger of this time is not wars, famines, or diseases, but the wicked ways of men."

The Character of False Teachers

These wicked people love themselves, which is one of the defining traits of our time. They are lovers of money, boastful, and arrogant. In the modern church, it is hard to find truly humble people — instead, there are many proud and conceited individuals. Blasphemers are those who slander and defame others. They are rebellious, ungrateful, and fail to recognize the good that others have done for them. They have no love for their parents, children, or friends. Their anger is out of control, they don't seek peace, and they criticize everyone. They lack self-control, giving in to their lowest impulses. They are cruel, despise everything good, and are treacherous, willing to sacrifice their integrity to get what they want. In church, they appear godly — but outside, their behavior is very different. They wear a mask of religiosity to look spiritual and feel superior. As Paul had already warned the Corinthians: "bad company corrupts good morals."

Paul also mentions false teachers who took advantage of naive and weak women burdened with guilt from sin, making them easy targets for deception. He calls them people who are always learning but never come to true knowledge of God. Paul compares these false teachers to the Egyptian magicians who opposed Moses — just as they were eventually exposed and brought to shame, these false teachers will also be made obvious. Their lies and foolishness will be revealed.

Persevere as Paul Did

After confronting the false teachers, Paul turns to Timothy, his beloved son in the faith. Unlike these deceivers, Timothy has closely followed Paul's teachings and example. He has imitated Paul's commitment to the gospel and his unwavering trust in the Lord. This faith helped him endure suffering. He was a man of perseverance, not easily giving up when faced with difficulty.

These qualities were proven when Timothy accompanied Paul during his persecutions in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. As a new believer, Timothy witnessed Paul being expelled from Antioch, threatened with death in Iconium, and stoned in Lystra, where he was left for dead. Reflecting on these events, Paul says, "What persecutions I endured, and the Lord delivered me from them all." Paul shares this not to discourage Timothy but to help him understand the power of the gospel and the strength of the God they serve. He also warns that the false teachers — whom he calls "evil men and impostors" — will continue deceiving those who listen to them, though they are also deceiving themselves.

All Scripture Is God-Breathed

Paul encourages Timothy to remain firm in the teachings he has learned — not only from Paul but also from his mother and grandmother, who faithfully taught him the Scriptures of the Old Testament. These Scriptures pointed to Christ and revealed the need to trust in God's promises.

Paul concludes with two key principles. First: "All Scripture is inspired by God." This is a foundational statement on the doctrine of divine inspiration. Scripture is God-breathed, meaning He is the ultimate author — even though human hands wrote it, it carries full divine authority. Second: Scripture equips believers for every good work. It teaches the truth needed for a godly life, corrects errors, and shows the way to holiness.

"Paul wants Timothy to know that anyone who desires to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will face persecution. A look at church history shows that persecution is real — and it is not an exaggeration."

Once again, Paul exhorts Timothy to preach the Word of God. This calling is urgent. Paul is not only urging Timothy to heed his words, but he is also invoking the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ as witnesses — He who will judge the living and the dead at His second coming. The exhortation is pressing: Timothy must proclaim the Word of God at all times, seizing every opportunity that comes his way. This is the duty of every faithful preacher who has been called to serve in the Lord's army.

Two Reasons to Preach

Paul's exhortation has two main reasons: first, the apostasy of the last days, and second, the apostle's imminent death.

Regarding apostasy: Timothy was to correct false doctrines using solid biblical arguments so that people could understand their error, change their way of life, believe in Christ, repent, and be forgiven of their sins. A time will come when people will no longer want to listen to sound doctrine — the gospel of grace through faith in Christ — but instead will seek teachers who tell them what they want to hear: messages that focus on material promises, that do not confront sin, and require no repentance. These false teachers preach a distorted gospel, but there are also people who deliberately seek this type of message. That is why today we see large congregations following prosperity preachers, promoting what someone once called a "Light Gospel" — a gospel tailored to the consumer's preferences. In contrast, Timothy was to be sober in all things — a faithful teacher of God's Word, seeking to please God, not men.

Poured Out as a Drink Offering

The second reason for Paul's exhortation is that he sensed his death was near. This second imprisonment was very different from the first. His death is approaching, and he expresses this by using the image of the drink offering in Numbers 28:7 — a wine offering poured out on the altar alongside the burnt sacrifice, as an act of thanksgiving. Paul compares his life to that drink offering — being poured out in accompaniment to the perfect sacrifice of Christ, the spotless Lamb on the cross of Calvary.

Paul not only looks to the future but also reflects on the past, using three metaphors: the soldier, the athlete, and the guardian. As a soldier, he has fought the good fight and emerged victorious. As an athlete, he has finished the race. As a guardian, he has faithfully kept the deposit entrusted to him by the Lord. Despite all difficulties, Paul has remained

faithful and has kept the faith — implicitly telling Timothy, "Don't give up — continue your ministry."

After evaluating his life, Paul looks to the future and the reward he will receive for his faithfulness: the crown of righteousness, which is awarded to all who persevere to the end. Paul is not boasting or exalting himself; he acknowledges that the crown will be given to him by the Lord, the righteous Judge of the universe. And not only to him, but to all who believe in Him and who eagerly await His second coming.

Final Words

In the final verses, Paul asks Timothy to visit him as soon as possible, before winter, and to bring his cloak, the books, and above all the parchments. He tells Timothy that Demas had abandoned him, having loved the world more than God, His people, and His work. Paul also warns him about Alexander the metalworker, who caused him great harm, advising Timothy to be cautious.

Paul was alone when he gave his first defense before the Roman tribunal — none of his collaborators were there to support him. Yet the Lord stood by him and strengthened him so that the gospel might be fully proclaimed to a large audience of Gentiles who heard the message of salvation. The Word of God does not return void — it accomplishes the purpose for which it is sent.

Paul sends greetings to his faithful friends and collaborators: Priscilla and Aquila, Onesiphorus, and other fellow believers. All the people Paul mentions — men and women, friends and foes, believers and unbelievers — had some kind of influence on his ministry and the work being done in the newly established churches. In his farewell, Paul commends the church in Ephesus to the grace of the Lord, likely knowing that he would never see them again. These final words reflect a man who deeply loved Jesus, who had received abundant grace, and who was powerfully used for the expansion of God's kingdom.

*"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."
— 2 Timothy 4:7. Don't give up. Continue your ministry.*