

The Pastoral Epistles of Paul—2 Timothy

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Outline of Second Timothy

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Paul's Second Epistle to Timothy

Setting and Purpose of the Letter

Having been imprisoned once again in Rome under Nero in 66-67 AD, Paul awaits his execution. Writing to his child in the faith and apostolic representative, he delivers a stirring charge to Timothy to endure severe hardship in the gospel ministry in the midst of very difficult circumstances, including apostasy. He also writes so that Timothy will pay him one last visit in Rome.

I. Salutation and Thanksgiving (1: 1-5)

The salutation is typical Pauline with the elements of grace, mercy, and peace. Mercy is pity plus action (like the Good Samaritan). Grace is the foundation of mercy in that mercy does not depend upon the worthiness of the recipient. That is, we did not deserve God's mercy which was given to us on the basis of the undeserved grace of God. Therefore, showing mercy to others does not depend on their merit. Further, it is God's grace working in us which produces mercy. Peace primarily refers to the new relationship with God which is sustained through the grace poured out upon us through the death of His Son (Rom. 5: 1). Once at war with God, we now have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ who died to abolish the enmity (hostility) between us and God.

Paul thanks God for Timothy's sincere faith which began first in his grandmother and mother and was passed on to Timothy. He prays for Timothy regularly. Timothy's tears refer possibly to his anguish at Paul's departure for Macedonia years earlier (1 Tim. 1: 3; NASB Study Bible, 1999). The timing is not as important as the indication of Timothy's intimate relationship with Paul who was his spiritual father (cf. 1 Tim. 1: 2; **2 Tim. 2: 2**).

The "forefathers" of **v. 3** obviously do not refer to the multiple generations of wayward Jews who first tested God in the wilderness of Sinai and continued to test him throughout the history of the Jewish nation. Nor can it refer to Paul's immediate generation who crucified Christ and continued in disbelief. He is referring to the believing **remnant according to God's gracious choice** (Rom. 9: 27; 11: 5), living in any generation, who believed the promises of God and served Him with sincere hearts—Abraham, the patriarchs, and their true children (Gal. 3: 7).

II. Personal Exhortations to Timothy (1: 6-18)

Paul then begins a long list of exhortations to Timothy which may be roughly categorized into two groupings—although not so neatly distinguished from one another. First, Paul speaks to Timothy on a very personal level to encourage him in the exercise of his spiritual gifts—preaching, teaching, evangelism, etc. Second, he exhorts him particularly in the responsibilities of the Christian ministry.

A. Develop and use your spiritual gift (1: 6).

The singular, "gift" should not be so narrowly interpreted to rule out the expression of many spiritual gifts in Timothy's life, although preaching and teaching may have been at the forefront of Paul's mind. "Kindle afresh" literally means to fan into flame, as of a fire which is burning

low and needs to be stirred up to keep it burning. Sometimes the “fire in the bones” (Jer. 20: 9) burns very faintly, and Timothy was a man who probably needed regular encouragement in his ministry. From vv. 7-8 we get the impression that he lacked courage and may have suffered some degree of embarrassment or shame at Paul’s imprisonment (v. 8; why else would Paul admonish him not to be ashamed?). As an encouragement to Timothy, Paul reminds him that he (Timothy) has a gift from God the Holy Spirit confirmed upon him (or acknowledged as valid) through the laying on of Paul’s hands. In his first epistle to Timothy, Paul warned him not to lay hands (of ordination) upon a man too hastily for the office of elder lest he share in the responsibility for his failure in the ministry. But Paul had not hesitated to lay his hands upon Timothy and was still sure that he possessed the necessary gifts and moral qualifications not only as an elder but as his apostolic representative.

This fact should be an encouragement to everyone in the ministry who, because of the fear of men, often doubts his calling. The fear of men is a natural, besetting sin among many in leadership positions. To some extent, this fear must be overcome for anyone to function effectively in the ministry. Yet, there is no such thing as courageous perfection, and all of us must be reminded from time to time that the fear of God and the fear of man are mutually exclusive (the one excludes the other). We must, therefore, depend upon the Lord to give us the courage to speak the truth in love regardless of the consequences—something which is not easy. God gave the church spiritual gifts which are manifested and brought to expression through mortal, sinful men (Eph. 4: 8-12) and our fears should not be allowed to douse (put out) the fires of these gifts. We have a holy obligation to keep them burning within us for the sake of Christ and His church (2: 10), although at times we would just like to quit. Apparently, Paul had heard that Timothy was very discouraged over his imprisonment and desperately needed a good word to keep going. We all do from time to time, and one of the functions of presbytery meetings—or informal gatherings of elders—should be the mutual encouragement of fellow elders who are struggling in one way or another. “Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up” (Ecc. 4: 9-10).

B. Do not be ashamed, but suffer willingly for the gospel (1: 7-12).

The word “timidity” (NASB) can be translated “fear” or “fearfulness”. Timothy was no coward, and Paul would never have accused him of being one. On the other hand, v. 8 (as mentioned earlier) may indicate a sense of embarrassment at Paul’s imprisonment. The gospel was the power of God unto salvation, and all believers were looking ahead to the consummation of the kingdom of God, the summing up of all things in Christ Jesus in which all wrongs would be set right and the will of God would be done on earth as it was in heaven. But now Paul is in Roman prison—the *second* time—and there is little likelihood of his release. This could be the end, and according to Paul’s reckoning (and historical record), it *was* the end (4: 6). Perhaps Timothy felt a little like John the Baptist who, while imprisoned by Herod and expecting his own execution, sent his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?”, It did not appear as if Christ’s kingdom was winning or that His *enemies* were being destroyed (Matt. 3: 11-12). John was the one in prison, not Jesus’ enemies! Likewise, Timothy’s friend and spiritual father was the one in prison awaiting execution!

Nevertheless, God had not given His chosen ones a spirit (or “Spirit”) of fear but of “power and love and discipline” (cf. Rom. 8: 15). The gospel was, indeed, the power of God unto salvation to

everyone who believed (Rom. 1: 16), and just as King Jesus had inaugurated His kingdom with love for His enemies, suffering and death—and not with earthly pomp and power—His disciples must imitate His life and death by proclaiming His kingdom through the same means—love, suffering, and death (in a word, self-denial)—“according to the power of God” (v. 8). Such means are certainly not very conventional (usual) ways of displaying one’s power or consolidating a kingdom, but it was the very pattern provided by the life and death of Jesus Christ. Rather than being ashamed at Paul’s imprisonment, Timothy must therefore “join” with him in suffering for the gospel, for it is through suffering, death, and loving our enemies that the kingdom moves forward to its inevitable completion. This is true power, not the power of smoking AK-47’s, rocket propelled grenades, or dictatorial regimes, but supernatural power that overcomes the world. Again, this doesn’t make much sense to the natural man, but it is the power of God which has prevailed and will continue to prevail over man’s sin.

The nature of this gospel is clearly established in the verses which follow. We are called and saved on the basis of God’s “purpose and grace”, not on the basis of our works (v. 9). (For “purpose”, *prothesis*; see Rom. 8: 28; 9: 11, 17; Eph. 1: 11.) And what is God’s “purpose”? It appears from Rom. 9: 11 and 17 (where “purpose” is implied) that God’s purpose was to choose people for salvation who did not exhibit any outstanding moral or worldly qualifications (ethical superiority, intellect, wealth, cultural achievement, etc.). Had He chosen such worthy objects, then His choice would have appeared to be out of His control, constrained and demanded by man’s independent merit. In v. 9, “according to His own purpose and grace” is contrasted with “not according to our works”. To illustrate, if 100 men are in the “World’s Strongest Man” competition, the judges are constrained (forced) to pick the man who is able to lift, pull, or push the most weight in a variety of contests, not the one who needs the psychological lift of winning a contest or the one who needs the money. The judges are forced to pick the strongest man among all the contestants. But it was God’s purpose that His choice would be made *independent* of any human merit and solely upon the basis of His autonomous and sovereign will to choose whomever He wished to choose. “So then it *does* not *depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy” (Rom. 9: 16). In this way, the sovereign, unmerited grace of God is highlighted against the background of man’s total *lack* of qualifications. It is by grace, and grace *alone*, that we have been saved; and even the faith which reaches out to receive that grace is itself the gift of God (Eph. 2: 8).

And when was this grace given to us? It was granted to us in *eternity past* before we were born, before any of us had done anything good or bad (v. 9b; Rom. 9: 11a; cf. Eph. 1: 4). The verb is an aorist participle signifying a *definitive activity* at a point in time. At a definite point in time in eternity past, God granted grace to His elect people on the basis of His sovereign choice, not on the basis of foreseen merit on their part. Before physical birth or spiritual birth, God’s people were already marked off for God’s gracious purpose in Jesus Christ. By analogy, before a king’s baby boy is born, he is already celebrated as the heir to the throne. The king’s love, favor, wealth, power, influence, and status are already granted to the unborn prince who will one day inherit all these privileges; but only after he is born will the son receive and experience these privileges. Likewise, the elect of God are born into the world as sinners separated from God’s benefits but yet certain to receive His benefits upon regeneration, repentance, and faith—the new birth followed by conversion. Furthermore, we are destined to represent Christ, the King of Kings, as His ambassadors on earth, the “holy calling” to which we have been called (v. 9; cf. 2 Cor. 5: 20).

Furthermore, God’s purpose and grace have been “revealed by the appearing” of Christ Jesus in space and time. Eternity is timeless, but human beings live and die in space and time. In the incarnation of Christ, God *invaded* space and time to publish the good news of the gospel. This good news was, indeed, predicted by the prophets and given concrete representation in the OT through stories and pictures (types and shadows) but fully manifested through the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Through His work on the cross He utterly defeated and abolished death which had entered the world as an abnormal intruder because of man’s sin. Death is not “normal”, but an aberration (departure from the normal) which has resulted from a departure from God’s revealed will. Man was created for eternal life with God, but he has chosen death instead. Through faith in Christ man may now live out the eternal, immortal purpose for which he was created, for Christ has “brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (v. *10b*).

It was for this gospel that Paul was appointed to the three-fold office of apostle, preacher, and teacher (v. *11*). To these appointments could be added evangelist, missionary, church planter, and virtually every other responsibility given to Christian leaders. To accomplish this multiple mission, Paul is willing to suffer any sort of discomfort and persecution—even imprisonment in a cold, dark prison (v. *12*). It is clear from this epistle that Paul’s second imprisonment in Rome is not the same sort as the first. Paul was also imprisoned in Rome when he wrote to the Philippians, but his circumstances and expected outcome were entirely different on that occasion. Rather than a dungeon, he was living under house arrest in which he had access to members of the praetorian guard (palace guard) and servants in “Caesar’s household”, some of whom had been won to Christ under Paul’s influence (Phil. 1: 13: 4: 22). He was also allowed free access to leading Jews of the city before whom he defended the Christian faith (Acts 28: 16-17). However, when writing the second letter to Timothy, he apparently lacks even sufficient clothing to keep him warm and requests that Timothy bring him the cloak (coat) he had left at Troas (4: *13*). Furthermore, while fully expecting his release from prison on the first occasion, he is equally certain on the second occasion that he will soon die (compare Phil. 1: 19-26 with *2 Tim. 4: 6-7*).

Paul had learned to be content in any situation (Phil. 4: 11), this one included; and he was not ashamed of his chains on Christ’s account. But he wanted Timothy to share this conviction, and twice in a single paragraph he discounts the need for shame (vv. *8, 12*). For some people and some cultures, appearance is the substance of reality. In this scheme, all truth is based on empirical (observable) evidence. Even one of Jesus’ disciples had to see the risen Christ for himself before he would believe it (Jn. 20: 25). For this reason the Christian faith is often viewed as a farce, a *non-empirical myth* believed by simple-minded people who can’t understand modern scientific evidence. How can people believe in a resurrected savior when scientific evidence insists that no such thing can happen? The “fact of the matter”—according to modern empiricists and rationalists—is that the man Jesus died as a criminal; and, at best He was delusional, thinking he was the son of God. After 2000 years, the world appears to have as many problems as it did before apart from the technological progress which has nothing to do with the Christian faith, but the result of empirical science. So the thinking goes. The Christian faith is often confronted with occasions for embarrassment and shame, beginning with the crucifixion of Christ. Its best proponents and spokesmen—like Paul and modern pastors in Pakistan, Sudan, and other countries where the Christian faith is persecuted—are often hounded and imprisoned; and many live in poverty and sickness. Surely if Christianity were true, its advocates (those who say it is true) would not suffer so much.

We know, however, that truth is not always determined by external appearances. There is an unseen reality which transcends this temporal world, and our faith is based upon this unseen world of God's truth, "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are *seen*, but at the things which are *not seen*; for the things which are seen are *temporal*, but the things which are not seen are *eternal*" (2 Cor. 4: 17-18; emphasis mine). This does not imply that the empirical observations of the risen Christ don't matter (cf. 1 Cor. 15: 5-6) but that they are not the whole story. Otherwise, Christians would require fresh empirical miracles each day to sustain their faith, a requirement which Jesus condemns (Lk. 11: 29).

But shame also arises from false teaching *within* the church. There were many teachers in Ephesus who opposed Paul's doctrine (1 Tim. 1: 3-4; 6: 3-6; 2 Tim. 1: 15; 2: 14-18; 4: 3-4), some of whom were apparently teaching a health and wealth gospel and supposed that "godliness was a means of gain" (1 Tim. 6: 5). No doubt Paul's critics were taking a morbid delight in his imprisonment and argued that if Paul's teaching was correct, God wouldn't punish him by allowing his imprisonment! (The rigid retribution theology of Job's three friends, which allows no exceptions to the rule—God blesses those who are good—survived long after Job's ordeal and survives to this day.) Thus, Paul must advise Timothy not to be ashamed of "the testimony" of the Lord—a testimony of suffering and death—or of Paul's testimony of imprisonment. Rather, he must join with Paul and Christ himself in suffering as the necessary means of testifying of the truth of the gospel. ***The gospel is demonstrated as true not because its proponents always live easy and prosperous lives, but because they overcome adversity through God's power.*** As Christ rose from the seemingly ultimate defeat of crucifixion and death, Paul will also overcome persecution and death through the power of God. He knew whom he believed, and he was confident that his faith, suffering, and work as an apostle was not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15: 58) in spite of appearances to the contrary. Timothy must be as convinced as Paul that God was able to guard what he had entrusted to Him—namely, his life, ministry, and those he served—"until that day", the day of Christ's return. Only by such confidence would he be able to continue his work.

We should take note of the exact wording of **v. 12b**. Paul does not say that he knows "*what*" he believes, but that he knows "*whom*" he believes. For Paul, the Christian faith was not primarily a body of knowledge or a "confession of faith" to subscribe to but a ***relationship with a person***, the person of Jesus Christ. But a remark like this can be easily misinterpreted. This does not imply that Paul was uninterested in doctrine; for without doctrine, one could not know who this Christ was or what He did (see **v. 13** below). However, he also recognized—and we must recognize—that the believer cannot embrace the Christian faith merely with raw intellect detached from arms and legs. He must embrace Christ with his arms as well—that is, with his heart, will, emotions, in summary, his whole being (Matt. 22: 37)—and he must run the race that is set before him (1 Cor. 9: 24-26). There are many who like to play with theology like a toy, but what they have learned about the faith has not gripped them with its power or changed their lives (**3: 5**). They know many things ***about*** Christ, but they have not known ***Christ***. They know ***what*** but not ***whom***. Paul, on the other hand, knew Christ whom He met on the road to Damascus, the same Christ for whom he was now willing to sacrifice all. This is the way it must be with Timothy and with us. And when we know ***Whom*** we believe, we will not be ashamed of our suffering or the suffering of others for the sake of the gospel. We will not be embarrassed when the gospel, on the surface of things, appears so weak and powerless; for Christ Himself appeared

weak and powerless on the cross and in the tomb, but He rose from the dead and now sits at the Father's right hand.

“That day” is none other than the return of Christ, and Paul uses words reminiscent of the Messianic prophecies of the OT (see Isa. 2: 1-22; cf. Rev. 6: 15-16; as well as many others).

C. Retain and guard the doctrines of your faith (1: 13-18).

Knowing the person of Christ implies knowing the *truth* about Him. Many stories have been told about women marrying someone they thought they knew, but further evidence revealed that this person was not who he said he was or presented himself to be. He turned out to have an assumed name and a secret past as a serial killer, professional assassin, child molester, or something else. He was an imposter. Some Italian and Cilician children grew up thinking their fathers were the kindest, most generous men they knew; but they were heads of organized crime mobs involved in drug trafficking and prostitution rings. They thought they knew their fathers, but really didn't. Paul knew Christ personally, and he loved Him; but he also knew all about Christ ontologically (His ethical perfection and His divine nature) and economically (His atoning sacrifice on the cross). The “standard of sound words” (v. 13) refers to Paul's teaching which had been passed on to Timothy, doctrinal truth about the person and work of Christ. This truth must be valued for what it was, a “treasure” which must be held fast and guarded at all cost. The error of *intellectualism*—worshipping theology in the place of Christ—must not be replaced with empty *experientialism*—worshipping a person about whom nothing is known. There are those who would say, “Let's not get hung up on doctrinal differences. Let's just worship Jesus.” But exactly who is this Jesus? Is he merely a good man? Is he a good teacher, a humanitarian? Is He God? Did He truly rise from the dead? Without sound doctrine, we know nothing of the one we are worshipping. We may simply be worshipping an abstract idea of who we *wish* Jesus is just as we often fashion God into our own image of what we imagine God *should* be. Without a body of true doctrine—a confession of faith, if you will—we have nothing real to worship, only a vague, idealized imposter whom we call Christ.

But why was Paul emphasizing this point? Simply because apostasy (falling away from the faith) was not a mere hypothetical possibility to Paul but a tragic reality. Several of Paul's associates in Asia had already abandoned Paul's teaching among whom were Phygelus and Hermogenes (v. 15). Paul did not want Timothy to become yet another statistic. But surely, we may argue, Paul knew the sincerity of Timothy's faith (1: 5). Quite true, but he may have been equally convinced of the faith of the others. At any rate, Paul would not assume that this could not also happen even to Timothy and warns him with the examples of the fallen. It is always a shock to the digestive system (like a punch in the stomach) to hear of people we know who have fallen from the faith either by way of immoral behavior or outright theological apostasy. About twenty years ago a well-known preacher and theologian in Cambridge, England left his wife and ministry for another lover, a man with whom he was having a homosexual affair. He remarked that he had made two big mistakes in life, becoming a minister and getting married. His exegesis was some of the best I have ever read, and before his apostasy his reputation was growing both in Europe and the US. Hearing stories like this is like hearing of someone who recently died in an automobile accident, and the report comes back that they were driving far in excess of the speed limits. We take such reports to heart and for a while, at least, we back off the pedal and slow down, realizing that something equally dreadful could, indeed, happen to us. “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall” (1 Cor. 10: 12).

But Paul also gives a positive example of one who did not fall, but remained faithful to Christ and to Paul personally, Onesiphorus. Apparently Paul's whereabouts (location) in Roman prison were so isolated that it took some effort to locate him, but Onesiphorus would not give up looking for him until he found him. Note that Paul says that he "was not ashamed my chains" (v. **16**), that is, his imprisonment. This now the *third* time Paul has mentioned being ashamed of the testimony of the Lord or his imprisonment, and we may seriously wonder how deeply Paul's imprisonment had shaken Timothy's faith. We can only speculate, but even if outright apostasy was not Paul's concern, Timothy's abandoning his post at Ephesus may have been a real possibility, something which would have been devastating to the church and to Paul personally. Timothy knew Onesiphorus as well (v. **18b**), for he had been very useful in Ephesus; and by mentioning him Paul provides an example of faithfulness which would encourage Timothy in his faith.

The difficulty with v. **16** arises with the *subordinate causal clause* introduced by "for" (*hoti*). "The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, *for* he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains..." Is Paul pronouncing a blessing of mercy upon Onesiphorus on the basis of his works? Again, in v. **18a** he says, "the Lord grant to him to find mercy from the Lord on that day." Mercy is *undeserved* favor, but it appears from these two references that mercy is the result of one's performance or works. Paul is pronouncing a blessing and requesting mercy for Onesiphorus and his house on the basis of the mercy which he received from Onesiphorus while imprisoned in Rome—mercy which was lacking from many other former associates who had deserted him. We need not be surprised, since Paul is doing the same thing Jesus did when telling the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25: 31-46). In that parable, eschatological (future) inheritance in the kingdom of heaven is presented as the *consequence* of showing mercy to the least of the King's brothers as if such mercy was shown to Him. Likewise, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "Blessed are the merciful, for [*hoti*] they shall receive mercy" (Matt. 5: 7). In our zeal to preach salvation by grace alone through Christ alone, we must not gloss over such verses which strenuously teach *an evangelical grace which cannot stand alone* (James 2) on the Day of Judgment. It is true that we can never merit our eternal salvation, but it is also true that grace without works is dead. Onesiphorus, and the sheep of Matt. 25, had proven that they were genuine recipients of grace and mercy who will on "that day", the day of Christ's return, receive mercy when standing before the judgment seat of Christ who will "render to each person according to his *deeds*" (Rom. 2: 6; Matt. 16: 27; Ps. 62: 12), not according to an empty *profession* of faith.

III. Exhortations Concerning Timothy's Ministry (2: 1-26)

A. Multiply your faith by entrusting it to faithful teachers (2: 1-2).

"You therefore" indicates the connection with the preceding discourse. On the basis of everything Paul has said so far, Timothy must demonstrate strength in the grace of Christ Jesus. It is crucial that he not abandon the faith or the ministry which is placed before him in Ephesus. Rather, he must ensure the future of the church in Ephesus by multiplying his faith through other faithful men who will, in turn, be able to disciple others. Two qualities are mentioned, *faithfulness and the ability to teach*. Faithfulness encompasses (includes) the spiritual and moral qualifications of elders given in 1 Tim. 3, while the ability to teach encompasses the one intellectual qualification (see commentary on *1 Timothy*). We need not limit the ability to teach to formal teaching or preaching, but the ability to impart the faith one-on-one to other believers,

an ability which is often demonstrated superlatively (excellently) by those who do *not* have the gift of preaching. Thus, we may not limit this exhortation to the development of good *elders* in the church, although this is certainly included; but the *disciple-makers* in any congregation are often those who have no official office (while the office of elder is commonly held by those who demonstrate little interest in the spiritual growth of others). While God uses good leadership within the church, He will not hold His church hostage to inept leadership, but will raise up within the congregation those who are zealous for His work—those who are the *unofficial leaders* within the congregation. (Such unofficial leaders are often threatening to the official leadership.)

Notice also that Paul does not specifically instruct Timothy to plant new churches, and we might have expected such emphasis from someone like him who planted churches in Asia Minor, Macedonia and Achaia (possibly also in Spain). Rather, he says, invest yourself and your doctrine in the lives of faithful men who will be able to teach others. We may assume that these men will do the same thing as Timothy, invest themselves in other men, and so on and so on. Rather than multiplying churches, Paul emphasizes the multiplication of disciples. If this is done, church planting should take care of itself.

How will Timothy be able to spot the “faithful” men in the congregation at Ephesus? He will do so through personal relationships. Jesus spent three years living and ministering with 12 disciples. (And he knew one would be a traitor.) He didn’t teach 400 men in a seminary class. This is the way the Western church has done it, and the method we have exported throughout the world; but the method may have questionable value in developing and recognizing “faithful” men. The ones who score the highest grades on our academic tests are not necessarily those who are faithful. We may well question our methods of theological education, and pray that God would show us wisdom in substituting different methods.

B. Keep Focused on Your Ministry (2: 3-13).

The following exhortations to Timothy in *vv. 3-13* can also be applied to all of the faithful men mentioned in *v. 2*, but Timothy must first apply them to himself. Through a series of metaphors and direct exhortations, Paul urges Timothy to keep focused upon the ministry entrusted to him.

1. By single-minded devotion to your duty (2: 3-4)

The first metaphor is that of a *soldier* enlisted in active service. When a soldier is enlisted in the army, he gives up his freedom to engage in any other non-related activity. He cannot own a business or work for another employer, for any such activity would distract him from his duties as a soldier. “Suffering hardship” and “active service” imply a soldier who is now fighting on the battlefield who certainly would not have the time to think about other entanglements. Such distraction would endanger his own life and the lives of others around him. At the time Paul was writing, battles were won with swords, spears, and arrows. With whirling swords cutting off arms, legs, and heads, arrows and spears whizzing around one’s head, one second of inattention could be deadly; and at the end of the battle, there were no hot showers and warm beds. As a soldier on the front lines of the battle, one must be willing to suffer hardship for the sake of winning the battle and pleasing his commanding officer; nothing else must be allowed to command his attention. So it should be with Timothy who was now facing severe challenges in his ministry. His field officer was now in prison, and Timothy must carry on in his mission

without him in order to please his enlisting officer (v. 4), Christ Jesus. The word of God was not in prison (v. 9), and he was commissioned to carry on the work Paul had begun. Furthermore, Paul was not asking him to do something other than what he had already done and was now experiencing. Paul was no stranger to suffering.

We cannot allow any absolute rules from this text against the practice of *bi-vocational ministry*. If we do, we would be contradicting the Apostle Paul himself who often made his own living as a tent-maker (Acts 18: 2-3; 20: 34; 2 Thes. 3: 7-10). Paul used his trade as a positive role model (2 Thes. 3: 7) proving that the minister of the gospel must not shy away from hard labor, even such a kind as tent-making—not the most respectable of professions in that day involving the use of smelly animal skins. Far too often, men who are repelled by manual labor wish to enter the gospel ministry so that they will not have to work hard for a living. Since they are lazy as manual laborers, they will be, most likely, equally lazy as pastors. The ministry involves strenuous mental, emotional, and spiritual labor which often keeps a man up late at night and wakes him up early in the morning. As a pastor in rural Arkansas, I once counted up the number of hours I had worked during the week until Saturday morning. I counted at least fifty hours, and I still had the Sunday morning and evening service to complete and preach. But don't expect your congregation to radiate appreciation for all your hard work. I once had a woman in my congregation ask me what I did all day long day after day. (To say the least, she was not impressed with my preaching.) This is not atypical (uncommon) of pastors who are serious about their work or members in their congregations who are oblivious (clueless) to it; and pastors often suffer nervous breakdowns—a distinct possibility in Timothy's case.

On the other hand, pastors must not allow another vocation to distract them from the primary duties of the ministry. While making tents, Paul could not be preaching in the synagogues; and he welcomed the opportunity for others to be working with him, thus freeing him to preach and teach more often (Acts 18: 4-5; note that before Silas and Timothy showed up in Corinth, Paul reasoned with the Jews every Sabbath, but afterwards he devoted himself “completely to the word”). Another business or job can demand so much attention that the pastor completely loses the focus of his primary calling. Incidentally, this is one of the problems with a plural eldership made up of men whose primary means of making a living lie outside the church. They have very little time outside their normal professions to devote to shepherding the flock; yet they make decisions in the church which require much biblical knowledge and wisdom—knowledge and wisdom they may not possess and which they will not be able to acquire apart from a serious allocation (setting aside) of time and energy. This is not an argument against the plurality of elders—a principle clearly taught in the scriptures—but an honest recognition of the challenges facing bi-vocational pastors. “Bi-vocational pastor” is a term which applies to *most* elders since *every* elder is a pastor (see commentary on *1 Timothy*). Men who are not able or willing to face the responsibilities of shepherding the flock should not accept the office, for they will one day be accountable for people they did not have the time, ability, or inclination to help (Heb. 13: 17).

But Paul is not just talking about another vocation, but *anything* which distracts us from our primary duties and so entangles us that we cannot free ourselves from it. I once knew the pastor of a church who was busily building his new house—quite a sizable one in a prime location—who spent more time doing construction than shepherding. He later lost this church and had to move to another one at a distant location, leaving his house to another buyer. The entanglement of which Paul speaks is one of becoming entwined in anything which causes us to lose our focus. The word, “entangles” (*emplekō*), is also used in the noun form (*plegma*) in 1 Tim. 2: 9 of

braided hair and in Matt. 27: 29 of the crown on Jesus' head *woven together* (*plekō*) with thorns. If Christian ministers—or, for that matter, *any* believer—allows himself to become so woven into everyday life and the cares of the world, he will be not able to break free to do his work. The world has woven him into its prison of superficial and superfluous matters. Jesus fully warned us about this problem—the seed among thorns (Matt. 13: 7, 22)—and it is quite likely that Paul presses into service the very metaphor employed by Christ to make his point with Timothy. No believer, least of all a Christian pastor, can be useful for service if he cannot extricate (disentangle) himself from peripheral matters (surface issues). Space will not permit a thorough examination of what constitutes “peripheral matters”, and I am well-aware that no consensus of opinion is likely to be reached. Yet, Paul certainly had something in mind or he would not have raised the issue.

2. By keeping your eyes on the prize (2: 5)

The second metaphor Paul uses is that of a *Greek athlete* from the Isthmian games (cf. 1 Cor. 9: 24-27). Winners of these games received a wreath or crown which would wither and perish with time, but the prize for running the race of a believer was imperishable. Strict rules were in force to regulate one's participation in the games, and any infraction of the rules would result in disqualification. What then, were the “rules” Paul was speaking of? Quite likely, they were the rules of Christian doctrine and morals, and Timothy must live according to the Biblical standards he had learned from Paul and others (particularly his mother and grandmother). He could not make up his ethical principles or theology as he went along but must adhere to the Biblical traditions he had learned. If he did so, not swerving to the left or the right, he would win the prize.

What is this prize? The reward of a “crown” is mentioned in several places in the Pauline epistles which can refer to (1) people who have been won by our labors (Phil. 4: 1; 1 Thes.2: 19); (2) the completed righteousness awarded every believer (2 Tim. 4: 8); (3) eternal life given to every believer (James 1: 12; Rev. 2: 10); (4) the crown of glory given to every believer (1 Pet. 5: 4). The prize could also be the reward for preaching the gospel faithfully (1 Cor. 3: 12-14; 9: 17) or the reward for any service, however menial, done for Christ (Col. 3: 23-24). It is probable that Paul has in view the reward for the faithful preaching of the gospel, and the rules are faithfulness to the Scriptures (cf. 2 Tim. 2: 15).

It is not a mercenary spirit which labors hard in the kingdom in order to receive the prize which God has offered but, rather, the proper response of faith in the promises of God; otherwise, God would have never given us the incentive of a reward. Some Christians will be saved with the bare minimum of faith, but they will look back at their life's labors with sadness as they view the smoldering remains of a life nearly wasted by disobedience, apathy, and worldliness (1 Cor. 3: 15). While ignoring the kingdom of God, they spent far too much of their energy building their own kingdoms. Exactly where the line is drawn between too little faith and that which is barely enough to save is hard to determine and is left where it belongs, in the hands of God. Second-place was not enough for Paul who fought the fight and ran the race in order to win, and it is a shaky business, indeed, for the would-be Christian to calculate just how little he can run in order to finish. It could very well be that the grace of God in Christ has not sufficiently gripped his heart, thus energizing him toward the finish line.

3. *By working hard (2: 6-7)*

The third metaphor is that of the *farmer*. The hard-working farmer should be entitled to his share of the crops. Paul uses the farming metaphor elsewhere in 1 Cor. 9: 7b-11. Considering the similarity of the present text with the text in *1 Corinthians*, some commentators believe that Paul is encouraging Timothy to accept material compensation from the congregation at Ephesus. This is a plausible interpretation, but a more likely explanation is that he is simply exhorting Timothy to work hard in order to produce the result—the “harvest”—of spiritual maturity in the Ephesian congregation. This will not happen if he fails to spend long hours laboring in the Scriptures, preaching, reproving, etc. (cf. *4: 1-8*). A congregation will seldom rise above the level of its elders (although see the qualification under III. A.) and a pastor cannot generate in his congregation the spiritual maturity which he himself does not possess. You simply cannot give away what you don't have.

Timothy must consider what Paul is saying, and he will receive the necessary understanding. This statement is not limited to *v. 6*, but to all the exhortations from *v. 1*.

4. *By remembering the resurrection of Christ and the fulfillment of prophecy (2: 8)*

Another means of maintaining the proper focus is by remembering Christ in two different respects. First, *Christ is risen from the dead*, thus defeating death and serving as the *guarantee* of the resurrection for all believers. In Paul's mind the resurrection of Christ from the dead distinguished the Christian religion from all others. Without it, all religion was in vain; man was still in his sin (1 Cor. 5: 17); and one might as well eat, drink, and make the most of this meaningless, miserable life, for death was the final defeat (1 Cor. 15:32; cf. Ecc. 2: 24; 3: 19; 9: 2; along with my commentary). Christians particularly were of all men most to be pitied if the dead are not raised since they of all religious people have the most rigorous requirements for holy living (1 Cor. 15: 19). If all men suffer the same fate at death, we might as well plunge ourselves into the giant cesspool of sin and debauchery. But Christ *is* risen, and His resurrection proves that there is a difference between men and beasts (contra Qohelet; Ecc. 3: 19) as well as a distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous (contra Qohelet; Ecc. 9: 2). The resurrection unto life for the righteous proves that God does, indeed, judge wickedness and rewards righteousness (Ecc. 12: 13-14). And although there are temporal exceptions to this rule in this present life (*Job*), eternal life allows no exceptions. Timothy must keep this in mind.

Secondly, Jesus is the *descendent of David*. This short clause reminds Timothy that Christ is the fulfillment of all the OT prophecies about the Messiah who was born of the Davidic line according to the Scriptures and who will accomplish all the covenant promises of the OT (Isa. 9:7; 22: 22; Jer. 23: 5; 30: 9). Even as God kept His promises concerning the Davidic kingdom by sending Christ Jesus, He will also fulfill everything the prophets have predicted concerning the eschatological kingdom of Christ (e.g. Ps. 2; Isa. 9: 6-7). Not a single promise will fall to the ground.

5. *By following my example (2: 9-13)*

A fifth means of maintaining his focus was to consider the *positive role model of the Apostle Paul*. While calling himself the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1: 15), Paul was not hesitant to point to himself as a positive example to imitate (1 Cor. 4: 16; 11: 1; 1 Cor. 15: 9-10). In *v. 3* Paul had

called upon Timothy to suffer hardship with him as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Paul now insinuates (suggests indirectly) that Timothy is not being asked to do something he (Paul) was not already doing—namely, suffering for Christ’s sake. For the sake of Christ and the gospel Paul is willing to suffer imprisonment. Yet, he does not suffer simply for the sake of suffering. The gospel is not imprisoned, thus giving his suffering meaning and purpose. Even in his first Roman imprisonment, Paul rejoiced that his incarceration had furthered the progress of the gospel by being a testimony to the praetorian guard and by emboldening other believers to witness to the gospel without fear (Phil. 1: 12-14). Whether by his life or by his death, Paul’s sole purpose was that Christ be exalted; “For to me,” he says, “to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil. 1: 20-21).

Awaiting his certain execution, his purpose had not changed; and Paul was sure that God was accomplishing His perfect will even through his martyrdom. He was in chains, but the gospel was not in chains and could never be imprisoned. That he could not presently do his work as an evangelist and preacher did not mean that God’s work would come to a grinding halt, for he was not indispensable; and others, like Timothy, could continue the work—quite the contrast to some celebrated preachers today who seem to believe that the kingdom of God depends upon their ministry. Paul was not only willing to suffer for Christ and the gospel but so that all the “chosen” (*elektos*) people of God might obtain salvation. The verb “obtain” is subjunctive aorist signifying an action which has not yet occurred. Paul could be speaking about salvation in one of two senses. *First*, he endures all things so that those who are elect **but have not yet been converted** can one day experience repentance and faith. Although they are the elect of God, they will not experience conversion apart from the God-ordained *means* of hearing the gospel (cf. Acts 18: 10; in which the Lord appears to Paul in a vision, assuring him that there are many elect people in Corinth who have not yet heard). The *second* possibility is that he endures all things so that those who are **presently Christians** can continue to grow in their faith and experience continuing sanctification which is another element of true salvation. Both of these meanings may be in view, but with either interpretation, salvation is accomplished through the means appointed by God—discipleship and sacrifice.

Paul loved the Lord with all his heart, but he loved the Lord’s people with the same fervor (zeal). His life and ministry had meaning, and his death would have meaning because he was not living for himself or dying for himself. He was living and dying for Christ who died for him and rose again for him (2 Cor. 5: 15), and he was living and dying for all of Christ’s elect. We will never have a full and meaningful life, even as believers, if we live selfishly. We not only live for Christ but for others, and we may seriously question our willingness to live for Christ if we have little regard for the welfare of others, particularly other believers. How can we say we love Christ and are living for Him, when we consistently fail to love the brethren in deed and in truth (1 Jn. 4: 20; 3: 17-18)? We must ask ourselves often, “How have I helped someone else this week? How has my life made a positive contribution to someone?”

Timothy would be encouraged to press on in the ministry as he remembered the life of Paul who never stopped pouring out his life (4: 6). **All of us need positive role models** throughout our lives, not just when we are young, for all of us are inclined to **measure ourselves by ourselves** (2 Cor. 10: 12). When we do this, we often look better to ourselves than we should and think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Rom. 12: 3). But when we look at others who are living self-sacrificially, we realize that we are not as devoted as we once imagined. We need regular **accountability** to someone whose life is a sterling example of self-sacrifice and

commitment to something and someone bigger than himself. By observing others, we are better equipped to examine ourselves. This, I believe, is the motivation behind Paul’s instruction to Timothy to multiply himself through others (2: 2). The process is not simply the impartation of information, but the impartation of a *life* fully devoted to God. We have seen this pattern before in the life and ministry of Christ. As I said before, Jesus did not establish a seminary; He chose twelve disciples and trained them intensely *by word and deed*. And while His model does not necessarily rule out seminary training, it does call into question the assumption that men are ready for the ministry upon graduation from seminary. Faithfulness cannot be measured by exams and written papers but only through active ministry. As a PCA pastor in the US once said to me, “You can give a man a *head* [knowledge] but you can’t give him a *heart* [faithfulness and devotion to God].”

The next three verses (vv. 11-13) provide an example of *an early confession of faith* which had become common among believers. It begins with the formula: “It is a trustworthy statement.” Other “trustworthy statements” are found in 1 Tim. 1: 15; 3: 1; 4: 7b-8; and Tit. 3: 5-7. The *first* part of this one is straight-forward. If we died with Christ in His substitutionary death, we will also live with Him by the same means, namely, by virtue of our union with Him in His resurrection.

Secondly, if by faith we endure to the end without apostatizing, we will also reign with Christ in the new heaven and earth, the consummated kingdom of God. Only the Christian who endures to the end of life *with his faith in tact* will be saved (Matt. 10: 22). On the other hand, if we renounce our faith in Christ and *continue impenitent*, Christ will deny us before the Father in heaven (Matt. 10: 32-33). The promises of the New Covenant, in one sense, are *not unconditional*. They are unconditional in the sense that everything has been accomplished which is necessary for our salvation. Christ has paid the full penalty of our sin. We cannot add anything meritorious to this atoning work; therefore, it is not conditional upon our performance. But the New Covenant *is* conditioned upon the genuine faith of the believer. We are not saved by grace *apart* from faith, but *by means of faith*. However, the denial of v. 12b is continual, ongoing apostasy, for we must remember Peter who, after denying Christ, repented and was forgiven. Although it is admitted that the tense of both verbs (“deny”) are future, “present patterns of behavior” is the major concern of the confession (Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, p. 512). This conclusion is supported by the fact that the verb in the conditional clause of v. 13 is indicative present active, “If we *are faithless*...”, indicating continuous action. (The verb is *apistoumen* from *apistéō*—“to fail or refuse to believe”—cf. Mk. 16: 16; Rom. 3: 3; 4: 20; 1 Tim. 1: 13; Heb. 3: 12; 1 Cor. 14: 23; Tit. 1: 15; Matt. 17: 17; 2 Cor. 6: 15; Lk. 24: 41; 1 Pet. 2: 7. In all these verses, a form of *apistéō*, *apistos*, or *apistia* is used). Thus, faithlessness is failure to believe and when considered in the present indicative, it is *continual and persistent* failure to believe.

From the verb used, *apistoumen*, we now have a clue to the interpretation of v. 13. One interpretation runs like this: There will be times when believers are faithless, but Christ is always faithful to us and cannot deny those who are united to Him as His body. So close is their association to Christ that to deny *them* would be to deny *Himself* (cf. Acts 9: 4, where Saul’s persecution of believers was equated with persecuting Christ). Faithlessness, according to this view, is not the same thing as continual denial of Christ or apostasy. If it is true that Christ will reject us for any number of times we act faithlessly, then no one will be saved. One must remember that genuine believers “are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation

ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1: 5); and, further, “He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1: 6). Apostasy is not a hypothetical possibility, but a real one; but the true believer will never apostatize “for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure” (Phil. 2: 13). In Peter’s temporary denial, Christ had already prayed for him that his faith would not ultimately and finally fail (Lk. 22: 32). With Christ praying for the believer, and the Holy Spirit working in him, he cannot finally and ultimately deny Christ.

The statements above are true enough as long as one interprets “faithless” as an occasional lapse in faith but not a pattern of unbelief. However, had Paul wished to convey only a lapse in belief, he would possibly have used the aorist indicative which specifies action at a point in time (usually in the past) but not continuous. Besides this, the *context of apostasy versus suffering* hardship for the gospel (1: 7—2: 10) favors the opinion that the confession is speaking of outright apostasy, not occasional failure. Doubtless, every controversy cannot be solved by an appeal to the Greek text; otherwise, there would be much less disagreement among scholars. Even the word, *apistéō*, applies to Jesus’ disciples in Matt. 17: 17. Yet, all things considered, a better interpretation is that of Hendriksen below.

Hendriksen says that the line, “If we are faithless, He remains faithful” must correspond to the previous line, “If we deny Him, He also will deny us.” Thus, the faithfulness of God is interpreted as His faithfulness in

“carrying out his *threats* (Matt. 10: 33) as well as his *promises* (Matt. 10: 32)! Divine faithfulness is a *wonderful comfort* for those who are *loyal* (1 Thess. 5: 24; 2 Thess. 3: 3; cf. 1 Cor. 1: 9; 10: 13; 2 Cor. 1: 18; Phil. 1: 6; Heb. 10: 23). It is a very earnest *warning* for those who might be inclined to become *disloyal*.

It is hardly necessary to add that the meaning of the last line cannot be, “If we are faithless and deny him, nevertheless he, remaining faithful to his promise, will give us everlasting life...”

If Christ failed to remain faithful to his threat as well as to his promise, he would be denying himself, for in that case he would cease to be The Truth (p. 260; underlined emphasis his; bold emphasis mine).

Calvin shares the same interpretation.

The meaning is, that our base desertion takes nothing from the Son of God or from his glory; because, having everything in himself, he stands in no need of our confession. As if he had said, “Let them desert Christ who will, yet they take nothing from him; for when they perish, he remaineth unchanged (2 *Timothy*, p. 219).

Thus, Christ can never be *unfaithful* in doing the very thing He promises to do, either *confess* faithful men before the Father in heaven (Matt. 10: 32) or *deny* unfaithful men before the Father. He is always truthful to His word. Furthermore, the prepositional phrase, “before my Father *who is in heaven*” puts this confession or denial in the eschatological context of the final judgment, additional proof that the confession is referring to a pattern of unbelief.

C. Interpret the scriptures accurately against all false doctrine and heretics (2: 14-19).

This is the third of a series of six exhortations pertaining to Timothy’s ministry (see outline). Wrangling about words or “worldly and empty chatter” is likely a reference to the myths, genealogies and Gnostic teaching addressed also in *1 Timothy* (see commentary). Such esoteric

(fanciful) teaching is useless in the fight against sin; and over a period of time will lead to spiritual ruin. (Bad theology always produces bad practice.) The Christian life is difficult enough even with the faithful use of the means of grace, but when the Bible is misinterpreted people will not be properly equipped to fight against sin. The Bible is not a magic book, and it will be a means of grace only if it is interpreted and taught properly. Paul is now calling Timothy to a *lifetime of study*. He makes no assumption—and gives Timothy no encouragement to believe—that his spiritual gift will render his preaching effortless. He must be a “workman” or “laborer” (*ergatēs*), the same word used when Christ calls out laborers into the harvest (Lk. 10: 2) and in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20: 1). The use of this word suggests that strenuous effort will be necessary if Timothy faithfully discharges his duties as a preacher and teacher of the word.

While the minister of the word should be able to speak extemporaneously (without preparation) on many passages of Scripture when asked to do so on the spur of the moment, this ability should never be an excuse for laziness in regular sermon preparation. He should never tempt the Holy Spirit by depending on Him to rescue him on Sunday morning with something helpful to say when he should have sought the Spirit’s help all week. Why should the Spirit grant the lazy preacher an extemporaneous word when the preacher has neglected the written word? This is sheer hypocrisy, not faith. The preacher should study however long it takes to accurately interpret the Scriptures for the sake of those who are depending on him to give them some sustaining nourishment during the week. While every Christian should be studying the Bible for himself, all Christians do not have the same ability or training to interpret it well; otherwise, God would not have given the church the *gift* of pastor-teacher (Eph. 4: 11). The preacher may still be a bit unclear in certain areas of the text, but at least he has given it his best “shot” (his best effort), and he can stand before God and before his congregation with a clear conscience without being “ashamed” (v. 15).

The word for “accurately handling” literally means to “cut straight”; and being a tentmaker, Paul likely draws upon his experience of cutting animal skins to make his point (*Robertson’s Word Pictures* cited in *BibleWorks*). The interpreter of the word should “cut it straight”, for God’s word should demand at least the same precision and care—and far more—as that of a master craftsman cutting leather or a piece of wood. As someone who used to make his living building cabinets and furniture, I am always impressed with careful craftsmanship—and appalled at sloppy craftsmanship. The best woodworking I have ever seen was built by a craftsman in Selma, Alabama named Roy Titus, an elder in a PCA church there. I once saw an \$8000 desk he had built for someone in Selma (and this was 1980). The dove-tailed drawers in the desk fit into the openings like the pistons of an engine with absolutely no slack from side to side or top to bottom. The rubbed oil finish was like glass. Gazing upon this desk, I felt like an amateur—which is what I was compared to him. He told me that he had not done very well financially in building the desk. I believed him, for his home was very modest, and he didn’t own any of his furniture. Even at that price, he had not made much per hour for his work. Nevertheless, his name was on his product, and he was more concerned with the quality of his labor than how much money he had made. He could look his customer in the eye and not be ashamed. His skill brought him before wealthy patrons. (“Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before obscure men” (Proverbs 22:29 NASB).

No one should be satisfied with doing sloppy work, and while the craftsman cannot continue putting more quality into his work than someone is willing to pay, the interpreter is not a hireling

(a hired man) working on a *quid pro quo* basis (one thing in return for another). The minister's work is not for sale to the highest bidder, and whether making a good salary or a poor one, the quality of his labor in the word must be the *best* he can offer.

There were some in Ephesus who were not cutting it straight. Paul names two men, Hymenaeus and Philetus who were upsetting other believers with false teaching to the effect that the resurrection had already taken place. Here we have Paul naming names. Twice in other epistles, Paul cautions his audience against slander (Eph. 4: 31; Col. 3: 8); therefore, is Paul failing to practice what he preaches? I get the impression from African Christians that one should never name the name of anyone in a negative way, for this would be slandering him. But it appears obvious that Paul does not consider this to be slander. He is simply stating a fact about what these two individuals are doing. Slander is the spread of *false* statements about someone, not truth. Now, it would still be wrong to spread *true* statements with the intent of harming someone; this is gossip which has no edifying usefulness. But obviously Paul did not consider his statement to be gossip, either. The false teaching of these men was harmful to the church, and Paul wanted it stopped. Timothy must therefore be warned about them even as he had to be warned about Demas (4: 10) and Alexander the coppersmith (4: 14-15). Although slander can be an ungodly national pastime, generally speaking a man must live with his own reputation, good or bad. Sometimes, a whole culture earns a negative reputation, and it must either learn to live with it or seek to change it (cf. Titus 1: 12-13 and commentary).

But what did Paul mean that they were teaching that the resurrection had already taken place? Most likely these two men were Gnostic heretics who did not believe in a *bodily* resurrection. Gnostics believed that the material body was the evil creation of the OT Demiurge that the Christian must escape to enjoy a fully spiritual existence (see commentary on *1 Timothy*, pp. 26-27). **Once he had become pure spirit, he was for all practical purposes resurrected.** But this resurrection was a spiritual resurrection only and had no implications for the body. Paul vehemently condemns such teaching in his first epistle to the Corinthians, arguing that if there is no bodily resurrection, we are still in our sins, since Christ would also not be risen (1 Cor. 15). The teaching was understandably upsetting to the believers in Ephesus who had been taught by Paul and Timothy that they would enjoy the inheritance of a new heaven and earth with, not without, their material bodies. (For an extended discussion of alternative views of the resurrection, see Towner, pp. 525-529). Although we do not find this specific teaching in *Ephesians*, it is safe to assume that Paul covered it in the three years he was there (Acts 20: 17, 31). God made man both body and spirit, and He put the body together in such a way that man was capable of living forever before he fell into sin (Rom. 5: 12). Even after the fall, 1500 years passed before man's life-span was shortened to the seventy or eighty years common in Moses' day (Ps. 90: 1, 10). Adam lived 930 years, Seth 912 years, Enosh 905 years, Kenan 910 years, Jared 962 years, Methuselah 969 years (the world record), and Noah 950 years (Gen. 5: 5-27; 9: 29). After the flood man's life was significantly shortened; Peleg living 209 years (Gen. 11: 19). I believe these records of long lives should be taken literally, and they are biblical testimonies to the truth of God's original intention that man's body is made to last forever. The resurrection body will be imperishable (1 Cor. 15: 42) even as Adam's body before the fall.

To pursue his warning against false teaching, Paul quotes two other common confessions among early Christians, "The Lord knows those who are His," and "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness" (v. 19). The connection between this verse and false teaching about the resurrection is found in v. 16b compared to the teaching of Gnosticism.

Gnosticism led to two different methods of escaping the body. One was asceticism and the other hedonism. In asceticism, one denied the desires of the body by abstaining from sex and certain foods and drink. In hedonism, the body was escaped by letting the flesh have its way in sexual indulgence and various other excesses (see my commentary on *1 Timothy* and especially William Hendriksen, *1 Timothy*). Paul has already warned in *v. 16* that worldly and empty chatter will lead to ungodliness, and it is likely that Philetus and Hymenaeus followed the hedonistic manifestation of the Gnostic heresy by living immoral life-styles. It is not difficult to understand why hedonistic teaching spread quickly like “gangrene”. Gangrene is nasty business, the decay of human tissues due to the lack of blood supply caused either by sickness or trauma (injury). It spreads so rapidly that often arms and legs have to be amputated well above the infected area to ensure that all the decayed flesh has been removed. Several successive amputations are commonly necessary to save the life of the patient.

False teaching is like this, especially false teaching which gives people the license to live as selfishly and immorally they please. The health and wealth “gospel” (which is “no gospel”) in the US and Africa promises a life of fleshly indulgence with money, and it is not surprising that churches which spread this “gangrene” are full while biblical churches are often struggling to retain members. Falsehood is easily propagated—and easily believed—because men’s hearts are wicked to the core. They will easily believe a lie which allows them to live as they please. On the contrary, biblical churches will not allow sin to go unchecked but will bring restorative discipline upon the sinful member (1 Cor. 5; Matt. 18: 15-20; see my commentary on the latter text in *Synoptic Gospels*). Truth requires accurate handling of the word of God, the kind of work which is always in short supply; and living this truth requires putting to death the deeds of the body and the sinful desires of the flesh.

In *v. 19*, Paul pronounces a veiled judgment upon Hymenaeus and Philetus simply by saying that the “firm foundation” (*themlios*; cf. Eph. 2: 20; 1 Cor. 3: 10) of God’s truth remains fixed and unchangeable under God’s “seal”. A seal is an official proof of authenticity or originality. In ancient times letters were sent with candle wax placed across the folded pages, thus sealing the letter shut. When a king sent letters, they would be sealed with his signet ring. The ring was heated and then placed into the candle wax across the opening of the letter leaving the imprint of his personal ring (easily recognized by any authorized representative) molded into the wax. This was done to prevent any unauthorized person from opening the letter and altering the king’s message, thus resulting in sabotage or injury to the king’s plans. No one who did not officially represent the king would dare open the letter, breaking the seal, upon pain of death. Paul is therefore saying that God’s message of salvation—His letter—is fixed and cannot be changed except upon pain of death. He knows those who are the official representatives and messengers of His truth (“those who are His”) and those who are mere saboteurs teaching error (see also Towner, pp. 531-533, who connects this text with Num. 16 and Korah’s challenge to Moses’ leadership.) Further, those who are “His” live godly lives regulated by His original message, not like Hymenaeus and Philetus who are mere imposters sabotaging the word of God with a lie.

D. Pursue personal holiness for maximum usefulness (2: 20-22).

In a “large house”, vessels of silver and gold will be suitable for the honorable use of serving distinguished guests their food and drink. Others made of wood and clay would only be suited to taking out the garbage. The large house is a metaphor for the visible church which by God’s providence consists of both true believers and false. While the false teachers are made of wood

and clay, Timothy is made of silver and gold. Where I come from in the southern US, we have an expression for someone who is highly recommended as an honorable person: “He is pure gold.” (Quite possibly the expression has a Biblical derivation from this text).

Paul uses a similar metaphor elsewhere in Rom. 9: 20-23 when speaking of the elect and non-elect (borrowed from the OT prophets—Isa. 29: 16; 45: 9; 64: 8; Jer. 18: 6). God raised up Pharaoh for the specific purpose of displaying His mighty power against him (cf. Prov. 16: 4). Furthermore, He loved Jacob and hated Esau before they were yet born, before they had done either good or bad in order to show that He has mercy on whomever He wills apart from human merit, and He hardens whomever He wills (Rom. 9: 1-18). This naturally leads to the question of Rom. 9: 19, “You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?’” After anticipating the question, Paul uses the metaphor of the potter and the clay. God is the potter and humanity is the clay. God has the sovereign prerogative (right) to fashion out of the same lump of humanity—lowly, sinful humanity—some people for honorable use and some for dishonorable use. He will display His wrath against sin and His power over it by making vessels of dishonor prepared for destruction, and He will display His mercy and power of forgiveness upon vessels prepared for glory “beforehand”, that is, in *advance* of their birth or conversion. A difficult doctrine, but one which moved Paul to worship (Rom. 11: 33-36).

While the text in *Romans* emphasizes the sovereignty of God, the present text emphasizes human responsibility. *Verse 21* contains a conditional statement. *If* anyone, Timothy in particular, “abstain[s] from wickedness” (v. 19) and “cleanses himself from these things” (v. 21; namely, “youthful lusts”; v. 22); and *if* (implied from v. 22b) he pursues holiness (“righteousness, faith, love and peace”), *then* (implied) he will be a person for honorable use, set apart and valuable to God for every kind of good work (vv. 21-22). We are justified in assuming the implication of the positive command (“pursue”) in the conditional statement since it takes more than simply “putting off” old sin patterns to be useful to God but also the “putting on” of new patterns (Eph. 4: 22-24; Col. 3: 9-10). No man can remain swept clean without putting something in its place (Matt. 12: 43-45). The Spirit’s work *in* us does not negate our responsibility to work *out* our salvation in fear and trembling (Phil. 2: 12-13).

God’s working in us is not suspended [interrupted] because we work, nor our working suspended because God works. Neither is the relation strictly one of co-operation as if God did his part and we did ours so that the conjunction or coordination of both produced the required result. God works in us and we also work. But the relation is that *because* God works we work. All working out of salvation on our part is the effect of God’s working in us, not the willing to the exclusion of the doing and not the doing to the exclusion of the willing, but both the willing and the doing. All this working of God is directed to the end of enabling us to will and to do that which is well-pleasing to him. We have here not only the explanation of all acceptable activity on our part but we have also the incentive to our willing and working. What the apostle is urging is the necessity of working out our own salvation, and the encouragement he supplies is the assurance that it is God himself who works in us. The more persistently active we are in working, the more persuaded we may be that all the energizing grace and power is of God (John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 148-149).

We will be spiritually useful to our Master only to the extent that we are putting to death the sinful deeds of the body (Rom. 8: 13) and pursuing holiness of life. No amount of natural intelligence or formal training will substitute for the four qualities mentioned—“righteousness” or moral integrity, “faith” in the power of God rather than our giftedness, “love” which reaches out to others, and “peace”, a peaceable spirit to work through conflicts with others. We can

achieve very little with our spiritual gifts and intellect when we are grieving the Spirit daily with arrogant pride, lust for sex and money, or a contentious spirit. The minister of the gospel cannot do his work well without continuing sanctification, and in this sense he is at an extreme “disadvantage” to people in other work, if I may put the matter so boldly. Let’s face it, people can succeed *relatively well* in other occupations *without* moral integrity. Surgeons can save lives on the operating table; scientists can explore the universe of ideas; engineers can design complicated machinery and infrastructure; pilots can transport people safely across the oceans; carpenters can build furniture—all because of God’s common grace. This doesn’t mean that the Christian faith would not help them to be better at their work. It certainly would, and I am not promoting a sacred-secular dichotomy (division into two parts) which proposes that Christianity belongs to the “upper story” of spiritual things but has no relevance to the “lower story” of real life (cf. Darrow L. Miller, *Life Work*). Nevertheless, because of God’s *common grace* people can function efficiently at their labor while living immorally—excepting certain extremes—otherwise, humanity would cease to exist because of sin (cf. Gen. 4: 17-26, the cultural exploits of the line of Cain).

But how can Timothy, or any pastor, continue fulfilling the difficult *heart-work* of the gospel ministry—preaching, exhorting, rebuking, admonishing, encouraging, etc.—while living a lie? I am well aware that some well-known and not so well-known pastors have been able to continue for years in the ministry while carrying on adulterous affairs while their congregations were oblivious to their philandering. Such men are exceptionally good liars, but few can lie so convincingly that they can hide their hypocrisy from *themselves*. Even if they can, it is impossible for them to carry on their work with the same zeal and energy they had before falling into sin. To be maximally useful, we must do our work with a “pure heart” (v. 22) undivided and unmingled with the impurities of this world.

E. Don’t waste your time with speculative theology (2: 23).

We have covered this topic already, especially in our study of *1 Timothy*. Theology which does not have the improvement of character as its main goal is useless. Timothy must avoid the error of arm-chair theologians who like to play with theology like children play with toys. They are only interested in winning arguments and impressing others with their intellect and imagination.

F. Correct the errors of others with gentleness (2: 24-26).

While Timothy must be ready to defend the true gospel against all errors and heretics, he must not go looking for a fight. He must not be quarrelsome, but patient toward those who are wrong, kindly and gently explaining the reason for their mistake. Rather than a harsh rebuke, Timothy’s kindness may be used by the Holy Spirit to bring them to repentance. “A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov. 15: 1). If Timothy chooses to approach his opponents in the “attack mode”—a common mistake which I have frequently made—the battle may be lost before it ever begins. They will simply put up their defenses and dig in their heels for a fight, never really listening to what Timothy has to say. Sometimes we may be able to win a few battles with superior knowledge and intimidation of our opponents, but while winning battles, we may be losing the war. Sometimes we lose by winning, and we win by losing. “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn. 12: 24). But if Timothy appeals to their senses and their understanding of Scripture, they will be more likely to lay down their weapons and discuss their

differences. This does not always work, of course, for some people will not listen to reason and will not be told that are wrong about anything.

The pastor must, therefore, have the combination of a gentle spirit and a “thick skin” capable of withstanding the psychological, spiritual, and verbal beatings he will have to bear. Assumed in the whole discussion here is that Timothy is *able* to teach someone one-on-one explaining why his theology or his behavior is in error. The goal is not to win an argument or to score points but to deliver the brother or sister from the snare (trap) of the devil. By describing the people as those who are held captive by the devil, Paul implies that these particular individuals are in a *different category* from Demas, Alexander, Hymenaeus, or Philetus who are more entrenched in error and are knowledgeable of what they are doing. Rather, the individuals of *vv. 24-26* are duped (deceived) and may just need a little straightening out. Rather than using a ball-peen hammer to “peel the grape” (correct the error), it is better to use a sharp knife. (Their situation is similar to the difference between the ignorant multitudes with whom Jesus dealt gently, versus the scribes and Pharisees whom Jesus called “hypocrites”.)

IV. Warning about Present and Future Apostasy (3: 1-17)

A. Avoid ungodly men who claim to be Christians (3: 1-9).

Timothy is given no false hope about an easy ministry. Paul presents a fairly bleak picture of man’s character in the last days (the time between the first coming of Christ and His return—cf. Isa. 2: 2; Hosea 3: 5; Acts 2: 17; Heb. 1: 1-2). We might wonder about Paul’s description in *vv. 2-4* when he says that men “will be” this sort of people. Hasn’t mankind *always* been this way? But the most alarming part about the description is that Paul is describing people who are *professing believers* who have apostatized from the faith, not those outside the church (so also Hendriksen, p. 285; and Towner, p. 554). This much becomes clear from *v. 5* in which Paul says that these people “hold to a form of godliness, although they have denied it power.” These are the religious folks, not the “rank and file” (ordinary) sinners who make no claim of being Christians. But if one argues that he is speaking of religious pagans, notice that Paul warns Timothy to “avoid such men as these”. But you can’t avoid contact with all unbelievers, and Paul would not even suggest that we do so.

I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; ***I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world***, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. ***But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person***, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*? (1 Cor. 5: 9-12)

Neither would Jesus suggest an isolationist approach who told us that we are the salt and the light of the world (Matt. 5: 13-14) and prayed to the Father, “I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil *one*” (Jn. 17: 15). Paul is not instructing Timothy to establish a Christian commune—like that of the Qumran sect—separated from all contact with the outside world. Rather, he is repeating the instructions given to the Corinthians to shun fellowship with any so-called brothers who live an immoral life-style or insist on teaching false doctrine. (The man he was referring to in 1 Cor. 5 was living in an incestuous relationship with his step-mother—“his father’s wife”—and the church had done nothing about it.)

The negative characteristics in *vv. 2-4* are fairly straight-forward. We should note that all of them are included within two major categories which may be intended as summary descriptions for the whole list—“lovers of self...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.” Loving pleasure is synonymous for loving self, and in this particular context loving self is the antithesis (exact opposite) of loving God. Paul is not describing the basic commandment of loving one’s neighbor *as he loves himself* (Matt. 19: 19b) but the basic sin of man to enthrone himself as his own god. (Loving self and worshipping self are two different things.) All the other hateful characteristics in the list are borne of self-worship and are subtitles or descriptions for self-worship and self-love.

The characteristic, “disobedient to parents” (also contained in the *Romans* list in 1: 30) comprehends (includes) one’s contempt for all authority, including the authority of God. Cultures cannot be maintained when there is no respect for parental authority. Closely connected to disobedience to parents is “ungrateful” (cf. Rom. 1: 21), and it is not accidental that this one immediately follows in the lists of vices. As disobedience to parents reflects contempt for God, so also ingratitude for parental love reflects a general ingratitude for God’s providential benefits. Speaking of mankind in general, Paul says that although men recognized God’s “eternal power and divine nature” through the works of creation, they “did not honor Him as God or give thanks”. Thus, one of the *defining* characteristics of fallen man is ingratitude for who God is and what He has done. Sadly, Paul now takes this defining trait of fallen man and applies it to those who claim saving faith in Christ. Ingratitude toward God manifests itself on the horizontal level as ingratitude to parents and all others.

“Without self-control” and “lovers of money” are the two characteristics which comprehend the major rival religions of any age—not Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism—but sex and money. The love of sex and money are practical expressions of self-worship and the love for pleasure. People will postpone indefinitely the felt need and desire for a relationship with God in order to experience yet another illicit (unlawful) sexual relationship or to have an extra 100,000 Ush (\$50). They will continue their immoral sexual affairs and their stealing day after day, year after year, hoping that at the end of their sinful lives they may yet have an opportunity to repent and get right with God—perhaps when they are too old to enjoy such things. But there is no guarantee that this opportunity will ever come. People die each day with little or no warning. Nor is there any guarantee that the Spirit of God will continue to “strive” with them by convicting them of sin (Gen. 6: 3). As men continue in sin, their consciences become “seared” (1 Tim. 4: 2) or “hardened” (1 Sam. 6: 6) so that it is always easier to commit the same sin (for example, adultery or theft) the second time than the first; and it is easier to do it the 100th time than the 10th. After successive hardening they may even convince themselves that what they are doing is no worse than any number of other sins which people commit; and besides, they can ask God now in advance to forgive them for the idolatrous lives they fully intend to keep living. But this is not genuine repentance which is a change of mind and turning from sin.

Such people have a “form of godliness, although they have denied its power.” Paul has used the term “power” earlier in *I: 7* in which “spirit” could—and probably should—be interpreted as “Spirit”, that is, the Holy Spirit. Thus, the professing Christians described in this passage are those who have never been indwelt by the Holy Spirit who alone can produce the transformation of life from practicing sinner to practicing saint. The Christian life is not really *difficult* to live; it is *impossible* to live apart from the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. This is precisely why Solomon says that one who is able to rule his spirit (human spirit) is a better

man than he who captures a city (Prov. 16: 32). Joab, King David's commanding general, was able to capture many cities, but he could never conquer his unruly passions (2 Sam. 18: 5-14), thus leading him to ruin and his ultimate execution under Solomon (1 Kings 2: 22-34). And even *with* the presence of the Holy Spirit, the true believer does not always avail himself of His power manifested in his inability to tame the destructive power of the tongue (James 3: 1-10)—among other besetting sins.

The apostates in Ephesus—their ungodly character notwithstanding—were able to captivate “weak” women who were burdened down with sins and carried away with various impulses. Familiar as we all are with egregious (outstanding for evil characteristics) stories of preachers who became sexual predators, we are tempted to interpret *v. 6* as an example of sexual exploitation. However, the context allows only for the fact that the false teachers were taking spiritual advantage of women who were gullible enough to believe their false doctrine. The word for “weak” could be translated “silly” (KJV, ASV), “gullible” (NKJ) or “weak-minded” (Hendriksen, p. 286), and perhaps their sinful past had made them very insecure and needy for attention. The false teachers filled this void in their lives by giving them individual instruction in the scriptures, making them feel special. Perhaps, also, the apostate teachers were giving these women a false sense of confidence in their ability to “understand” the scriptures better than others who had not been “initiated” in the “finer points” of biblical interpretation. This tendency would quite naturally flow from the characteristics of their teachers who were “boastful”, “arrogant”, and “conceited”, thinking they had special incite into texts of scripture which had long remained hidden to others. As stated earlier, the context limits the “captivating” activity of the apostates to spiritual deception in that these women were “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (*v. 7*). We should not accuse Paul here of bigotry against women, for in his letters he includes many positive comments concerning women who had helped him in his ministry (Phil. 4: 2-3; 2 Tim. 1: 5; to mention only two). In the present text, he is singling out a particular group of women who had allowed themselves to be duped (fooled).

In recent years, the English scholar, N.T. Wright, has created quite a stir among evangelicals with his new perspectives of Pauline theology, boldly entitling one of his books, *What Saint Paul Really Said*. Oh, really? Does Wright mean that after two thousand years of historical theology, including the work of Augustine, Calvin, Luther, and innumerable modern evangelical scholars, he is now the only one who has discovered what Paul *really* said? (For a scholarly critique of Wright's work, see *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul*, Guy Prentiss Waters, a critique endorsed by such well-known evangelicals as R. Albert Mohler Jr., D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, Mark Dever, Donald Macleod, and Timothy George.) I, for one, am very skeptical of anyone's teaching which claims to be “new”. Although the church should always be reforming and should never presume that the whole truth about God's word has been unveiled (see lengthy quote by Towner below), I am presuppositionally skeptical about God withholding substantive (important) truth from His church for 2000 years. Rather, isn't it more likely that the Holy Spirit has been steadily unveiling the apostolic teaching through scholarly research over the same period? The same can be said for the teaching of Charles Darby from whom the church received the teaching of Dispensationalism distinguishing the purposes of God for the church from His purposes for physical Israel. Such teaching has confused many, although it is in a different category from the soul-damning effects of the apostates in Ephesus (many of its proponents are evangelicals).

After having exposed the false teachers for what they were, Paul then makes an analogy between these men and the two magicians in Pharaoh's court who opposed Moses (*vv. 7-9*). The names are not found elsewhere in the Bible, but according to Jewish tradition, these two men opposed Moses when he was making his plea before Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go (Ex. 7: 11—8: 19). For a while they were successful in duplicating the miracles God had given Moses, but eventually they could no longer duplicate them, admitting that the power behind Moses was “the finger of God.” In the same way, the apostates of Ephesus will be able to strongly oppose the truth of the gospel and its authorized representatives, Paul and Timothy. They will also be able to draw away the hearts and minds of many just as Jannes and Jambres convinced Pharaoh to resist the providential activity of God. But in the end the false teachers will fail, and God will preserve both His authorized representatives and His church (Hendriksen, pp. 287-288).

Verse 9 is a comforting note to all true preachers of the gospel and anyone who labors in God's kingdom. On a day to day basis, it certainly does not appear to the visible eye that truth is prevailing over falsehood; and later in the text (*3: 13*) Paul admits that impostors will “advance” (*Young's Literal Interpretation*) from bad to worse (*prokoptō*; same word used in *3: 9*). They will make steady progress in their evil deception by luring gullible men and women away from the truth. Just look around you. Many of the churches preaching a health and wealth “gospel” are full while churches committed to biblical exegesis and sound theology are small and sometimes struggling to survive. Of course, this does not imply that large churches are always bad and good churches always small. We should avoid simplistic generalizations. However, Benny Hinn (I'm simply calling names like Paul did) has been to Kampala, Uganda; and thousands of people have paid a dear price of \$50 US to hear him speak. Never mind, for Paul expected false teachers like Hinn to progress for a time; but eventually their progress will cease, and they will be exposed as the heretics they really are. For the time being, we must live with the paradox (apparent contradiction) that God will allow such men to progress and prosper in order to achieve His ultimate purpose (Ps. 73). When that purpose is concluded, He will judge them according to their deeds (Ps. 73: 20).

Upon further reflection we must be cautious in taking an “us” versus “them” approach to this passage of scripture lest we fail personally to feel the sting of it. The sinful characteristics of *3: 2-5* bear close resemblance to many professing Christians in evangelical churches. They may not be rank heretics, but they are surely lovers of self, lovers of money, malicious gossips, ungrateful, unholy, without self-control, and so on. To be perfectly honest, we have to admit that these characteristics reflect all of us to one degree or another. Towner's prophetic application of the text is to the point and worth quoting at length.

Although it is quite clear that Paul wishes to separate the hardened apostates from the rest of the community, and that his method of caricaturing (vice list and use of well-known traditions) intends to put forth a blanket case, *we need to read this passage not as so many latter-day “Timothys” but, I would argue, as those whose own potential includes apostasy.* What makes an apostate? First, there is one's disposition toward the gospel. In the case of this letter, apostates are those who have not simply deserted the faith but who have *remade the gospel into a shape that for some reason they found more accommodating.* Certain elements in that remaking emerge, but there is a broader influence that is more useful for us to notice. For whatever reasons, they found Paul's gospel *insufficient or uncomfortable*, probably because it did not *affirm them* as they wished to be affirmed, or protect the things that were most valuable to them. Perhaps because of its stress on equality or universality, those whose insecurities depended instead on affirmation of their uniqueness tended to resort to interpretations that underlined limitations and reinforced boundaries. Perhaps

because of its stress on the unfinished nature of salvation and the pervasiveness of sin, those who were unsettled by a gospel that continually addressed immaturity and imperfection found it more comfortable to reshape the gospel into the proclamation of a finished salvation now. Whatever reasons lay beneath the production of a false, competing gospel, it must be assumed that the Pauline gospel somehow failed to satisfy some. Only those who had become hardened in their rejection of the traditional apostolic gospel are singled out in 3: 1-9, but the tendencies that were almost certainly at work in bringing them to this point are tendencies with which we ourselves have to wrestle.

Within our churches there exists this kind of apostasy, often *passing itself off as doctrinal purity* or rigorous adherence to *“the traditional faith”* or “orthodoxy,” be it Reformed, Lutheran, Baptist, or what have you. At the level of movements, at some point in time “the faith” came to be *set in concrete*, determined by historical councils and the documents and creeds that they produced. While the usefulness of such historical events and documents in helping us to understand the trajectories of the faith and the ways in which historical factors influence theology should not be denied, *the habit of setting the faith into concrete is nothing less than a caging of the gospel. At the personal level, the same is true. Whenever one reaches the point where the gospel or “the faith” has been completely systematized, completely molded into a shape that one feels most comfortable to live with, the gospel has been incarcerated. Its teeth have been removed.*

But the gospel is untamable, and to “cage” it in this way is really to reach a point where a person or a group *does not listen to it anymore. Paul’s gospel is wild, it seeks out weak spots in life, it challenges traditions and long-held notions, and it refuses to allow Christians to live too comfortably in their understanding of the faith or to cherish their personal interpretations.* It stands over all actions and theologies, and critiques them; and when that critique is not heeded, the road to apostasy has been entered. It is embarrassingly obvious from our own experiences with movements, churches, denominations, traditions, and theologies that reaching such a place in our belief is a very real possibility. But this is also obvious from another perspective. *Another glance at the qualities listed in the vice list of 3: 2-5 reminds us that these are sins to which all people are prone, and which in contemporary Western society (I will leave other cultures for those who live in them) have been easily incorporated into a comfortable, materialistic, appearance-oriented way of life (e.g., “lovers of money, boastful, proud, without self-control, conceited, rash, lovers of pleasure rather than lover of God”).* And just as Paul drew the similar picture of sin in Rom. 1: 29-31 on his way to the statement that “there is no one righteous...there is no one who seeks God...all have sinned” (Rom. 3: 10, 11, 23), so too here Paul more than half contemplates the possibility that *the picture he has drawn of End-time villains could just as easily turn out to include any number of lazy, unwary, uncommitted believers, as well as believers committed to the wrong things.* Rather than taking this passage safely as a graphic portrait of “them” in distinction from “us,” and so using it to reinforce the boundaries (theological, social, sexual, economic, cultural) we prefer to live cozily within, it is capable of functioning as a *mirror that is ready to reflect unsettling and painful tendencies in our character.* The mirror reveals to bring healing and growth, but the one gazing into it must own the reflection for this to happen. The way of Paul’s gospel that Timothy is credited with having taken is about to be described (vv. 10-17); it is a way filled with its own danger, but it is a better way to go (Towner, pp. 567-569; emphasis mine).

B. Continue to follow my teaching on the basis of my example (3: 10-14).

In contrast to the false teachers, Paul now presents himself as a positive example for Timothy to emulate (imitate). Although not joining Paul until his second missionary journey (Acts 16: 1-2), he was nevertheless well aware of all the events of the first missionary journey when Paul passed through Lystra and Iconium (cf. Acts 13—14). He had endured much affliction on that first journey including being stoned and left for dead outside of Lystra. Through all of his struggles he had maintained an exemplary Christian witness and a total commitment to Christ and the gospel. The list of *positive traits* in vv. 10-11 serves as a contrast to the *vice list* describing his and Timothy’s opponents (Towner, p. 569). The reader may be tempted to accuse Paul of

boasting, but this is not the case. Surrounded by impostors and those who were ambitious for money and power, Timothy needed a positive example to lean on. Paul had already mentioned the exemplary character of Onesiphorus (**1: 16**), and now he presents himself as someone to imitate, something he does on other occasions only when the need arises (cf. 1 Cor. 4: 16; 11: 1; 2 Cor. 11: 23-28). Sometimes good examples are hard to come by, and the Lord knows that we need them to encourage us in our faith and ministry. This is ample reminder to us that the Christian life was not meant to be lived in isolation from other members of the body of Christ. We need other people, and other people need us; and we should strive to live an exemplary life not only for the glory of God but for the good of others who are watching us.

It is generally true that ad hominem arguments (arguments against the person and not against the position he teaches) are fallacious. However, there is obviously a place for such arguments, for Paul makes one here. (He has already addressed the heretical theology of false teachers in both epistles; now he addresses what that theology produces.) Considering their immoral character (**vv. 2-5**), they are not men that should be followed and imitated. ***Paul, on the other hand, has proven the value of his teaching by his example***, and he urges Timothy to “continue” in the teaching he has received knowing the kind of man (Paul) and women (his grandmother and mother) from whom he has learned it (**v. 14**). Christ also uses the ad hominem argument to discredit false prophets on the basis of the fruit they produce (Matt. 7: 16, “you will know them by their fruits”). Bad theology produces bad fruit; and good theology, when consistently practiced, produces good fruit. I will admit that even false teachers can produce an external righteousness which successfully masks their teaching. Jesus himself admits that His servants cannot infallibly distinguish between the wheat and the tares and leaves the final job of weeding unbelievers out of His kingdom to His angels (Matt. 13; the parable of the wheat and the tares). It is also true that evangelical Christians often produce terrible fruit. Nevertheless, the general rule cannot be dismissed simply because of the exceptions. Bad doctrine produces bad fruit not only in those who follow it but in the one who teaches it. While it is unfair to expect perfect behavior from any teacher, it is a fair question to ask, “If his teaching does not produce exemplary character ***in his own life***, how can it produce exemplary character ***in mine?***” (cf. **1: 5**, also Towner, p. 581).

Additionally, Paul wishes to encourage Timothy with the certainty of deliverance in spite of all evidence to the contrary. Timothy remembers Paul’s persecutions and sufferings in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra; and how God rescued him out of every affliction (**v. 11**). In the same way, God will rescue Timothy out of any difficulty he must endure. But Timothy must see this suffering as a necessary part of his ministry and learn to expect it. Anyone, not just Timothy, who desires to live a godly life consistent with the gospel will be persecuted (**v. 12**). The Lord Jesus had already warned His disciples to expect persecution rooted in the world’s hatred of Him (Jn. 15: 18; Lk. 21: 17). Herein lies the paradox (an apparent contradiction): that Paul, Timothy, and all of God’s true people will continue to suffer persecution while false, immoral teachers “advance” from bad to worse “with no apparent hindrance to their evil influence” in deceiving themselves and others (**v. 13**; Towner, p. 578). But this was also true in the life of Christ, and it was true with the remnant of God’s OT people (Ps. 10: 10-11; Ps. 73). While the righteous appear at times to be forsaken, the wicked prosper.

But we may wonder how Paul can honestly promise the Lord’s deliverance given the admission of his imminent death (**4: 6-7**). Yet, Timothy would have understood, for Paul was a man who lived in two worlds; and he was often struggling with two different opinions concerning where

he would rather be, in this world or the next (Phil. 1: 20-24). Continuing on earth meant that he could further his ministry among the saints (“to live is Christ”), but dying meant living in the presence of Christ (“to die is gain”). Presently convinced that his purpose on earth was complete, Paul knew that his earthly life would soon be over; nevertheless, according to the Lord’s promise, not a hair of his head would perish (Lk. 21: 16-18; note, “and they will put some of you to death”; the passage affirms the resurrection of the body; cf. **4: 18**).

C. Trust the Authority of the Holy Scriptures (3: 15-17).

In **v. 15** Paul takes Timothy beyond his own tutelage (instruction) all the way back to his early childhood instruction, even from his infancy (*brephos*; cf. Lk. 2: 12). His grandmother Lois and mother Eunice had been OT believers who had faithfully taught Timothy the “*sacred writings*”, the OT scriptures. These OT scriptures were sufficient, apart from the NT scriptures (which had not been available to Timothy), to lead someone to a knowledge of salvation in Christ. The Bible is a book about God’s plan of redemption in Christ Jesus, and we should expect to see types and pictures of Christ throughout the OT, pictures which prompted a man like Simeon to declare of the Christ child, “Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, ***According to Your word***; For my eyes have seen Your salvation” (Lk. 2: 29-30; emphasis mine). They are the same Scriptures Christ used to instruct the two disciples concerning the necessity of His crucifixion (Lk. 24: 13-27). On all his missionary journeys, it was Paul’s habit to visit the synagogues and reason with the Jews from the OT scriptures proving that Jesus was the Christ, the long-awaited Messiah (Acts 17: 2-3; Apollos did the same; 18: 28). By taking Timothy back to his infancy and the OT traditions of his mother and grandmother, Paul was demonstrating the *timelessness* of the gospel tradition reaching back as far as the promise made to Adam and Abraham (Gen. 3: 15; 15: 6). This was no new teaching, here today, but refuted tomorrow. Timothy could trust it not only on the basis of Paul’s character but ***on the basis of its consistency with the OT.***

This equation of the reliability of the commodity and character of those who convey it was a standard way of measuring a truth claim in Paul’s culture; and it is the steady historical dimensions of the gospel (demonstrated by the reliability of the people mentioned) that Paul draws on here. To veer [depart from a path] from what had been passed on by trustworthy predecessors, without some good reason, was the exception and not the rule. Novelty had little intrinsic [from within] value and was regarded with suspicion (Towner, p. 581; words in brackets mine).

Hendriksen distinguishes the terms “all scripture” and “sacred writings” as two separate things. The “sacred writings” were the OT scriptures, but “all scripture” included any other writings since the close of the OT canon receiving the stamp of the Holy Spirit’s authenticity (p. 300). There is evidence in 1 Tim. 5: 18 that some of the gospel accounts had been circulated and received by the church as authoritative (note the quotation of Lk. 10: 7 which is placed alongside a quotation from Deut. 25: 4 and treated as scripture; Hendriksen, p. 301; see also Lk. 1: 4 in which Luke claims to give an exact account of the life of Christ). It is also true that by the time **2 Timothy** was written, Paul had already defended the authority of his own writings (1 Thes. 2: 13; 2 Thes. 3: 14; Gal. 1: 8-9; 1 Cor. 14: 37). Peter also recognized the authority of Paul’s writings (2 Pet. 3: 15-16) and does not hesitate to claim authority for his own writing on the basis of personal eyewitness accounts of the majesty of Christ (2 Pet. 1: 16). Although the canon of the NT was not *officially* completed until the Council of Hippo in 393 AD, the body of Christ (manifested in thousands of local churches) had progressively recognized the authority of those

writings which later became known as the NT. As Paul wrote *2 Timothy*, the scriptures were “growing”.

Towner takes a different approach (see pp. 585-590 for complete discussion, a brief summary of which is given below). First of all, *pasa graphē* can be translated “every scripture” in which case Paul could be saying that *every text* of the OT scripture is inspired by God, leaving none unaccounted for. (Thus, the ASV rendering, “Every scripture inspired of God” is an ambiguous translation leaving open the possibility that *some* scriptures are *not* inspired.) The plural form of *graphē* ordinarily refers to the whole collected canon of the OT scriptures (Matt. 26: 54, 56; Lk. 24: 45), but the singular form in **3: 16** is not used this way or even to refer to a book of the OT, but to specific texts. In Gal. 3: 8 Paul uses the singular form to refer to the specific text of Gen. 12: 3; and while his use of the singular form in Gal. 3: 22 may be interpreted more broadly as the whole OT, it could just as easily be a reference to a specific text quoted in vv. 10-13 and 16, particularly v. 10. Furthermore, Paul has already cited specific texts in earlier chapters (2: 19; 3: 8-9), and the immediate context of “sacred writings” would seem to dictate the meaning in **v. 16**. Timothy had grown up with the sacred writings, the OT, and Paul wishes to emphasize that *every single text* of these writings were profitable for him. The primary point Paul is making in the passage is that every text of Scripture is *useful or profitable simply because of its source*. It is “God-breathed” (*theopneustos*) and, therefore, useful.

...this statement of the divine authority of every text of Scripture is really preliminary [introductory] to the *main topic of the verse*, which comes in the second predicate adjective [“useful”]. Inspiration is, in a sense, a platform in the argument about Scripture’s “usefulness,” so that from the first adjective [“inspired by God”] flows the second. *But it is the thought of Scripture’s “usefulness” or function that Paul develops* (Towner, p. 590; words in brackets mine).

However one interprets “all scripture”, we now know that the other 27 books of the NT are also “God-breathed” and useful. But it is often the OT, not the NT, which gets shoved to the side as impractical and marginally useful for our edification and growth. Paul thinks otherwise and lists four specific activities facilitated by “every text” of the OT—teaching, reproof, correction, and training. Three of the uses are positive and one is negative.

“Teaching” refers to the content of redemptive revelation and moral instruction found in the OT. Every aspect of moral teaching found in the NT is also given in the OT, at least in principle. Of course, the NT expands upon the OT, and Jesus explicitly goes beyond Moses as the new law-giver in the Sermon on the Mount (see Vern Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*; also my *Synoptic Gospels*). The sin of adultery not only includes the physical act but mental unfaithfulness. Murder involves not only putting a man to death, but the hatred which precedes the act (Matt. 5: 27-28; 21-22). However, sometimes we find moral requirements in the OT which are not repeated in the NT. For example, no specific NT text deals with abortion, but the case law of the OT prescribes the death penalty for someone who causes the death of an unborn infant (Ex. 21: 22-23). If a nation’s legal system was consistent with the OT, abortion would be illegal.

Many civil laws found in the OT would be useful in modern contexts if properly interpreted and applied. In fact, many *are* applied, like the prohibition of moving your neighbor’s boundary marker in an attempt to steal his land (Deut. 19: 14). Further, since living in Uganda, I have witnessed the OT practice of gleaning (Lev. 19: 10; 23: 22). Many of the village women in my

former village of Bweya “glean” the smaller stones produced during the mining process. They then break these stones in smaller pieces with ball peen hammers to make crushed gravel for road beds. Compared to the millions of tons of stone removed from the hillside each year, what they carry off is insignificant to the quarry owner who looks the other way without disturbing their work. He may not know that he is obeying OT gleaning laws for the poor, but that is what he is doing, and God will bless him accordingly.

Often we need the narrative portions of the OT to illustrate the proper limits and application of some commandments. Rahab the harlot lied to her countrymen to protect the lives of the Israelite spies, but she did not bear false witness against her *neighbor* (Ex. 20: 16). Because she had changed her allegiances from the false gods of Jericho to the true God of Israel, she was at war with her own countrymen; and deception (lying) is allowable in a just war. God commands Joshua to deceive the men of Ai with an ambush, but Joshua was not violating the ninth commandment by obeying God’s command [Josh. 8: 2]. To cite another example, David was not committing adultery by having multiple wives, but polygamy. Moreover, Nathan the prophet does not rebuke him for being a polygamist; he rebukes him many years later for committing adultery. The OT, therefore, clarifies the difference between adultery and polygamy. We could cite many other examples.

“Reproof” is the act of convincing someone of error or making him aware of his sin (Jude 1: 15; Jn. 16: 8; Matt. 18: 15). Matthew 18: 15-20 shows the progressive stages of reproof beginning with less formal reproof escalating (increasing) to the necessity of public reproof and even excommunication from the congregation (Towner, p. 591). By using the example of the wayward Israelites, Paul cautions the Corinthians not to follow their example by continuing in sin (1 Cor. 10: 1-14). “Correcting” goes beyond reproof by showing the sinner the proper behavior. It is restorative (Heb. 12: 12; Acts 15: 16; where the root word *anorthoō* is used). It is not enough to reprove someone for doing the wrong thing; he must be shown right thing to do.

“Training [*paideian*] in righteousness” is synonymous with discipline (Eph. 6: 4; Heb. 12: 5-8, 11). In Greco-Roman culture the goal of one’s education was the full assimilation of the individual into civilized society (Towner, p. 591). The qualification, “in righteousness” (*dikaioσunē*) indicates that the training Paul has in mind is assimilation into the Christian culture and worldview characterized by moral uprightness.

The usefulness of every text of Scripture (which now includes both the OT and the NT) has the purpose of making the man of God adequate and equipped for every ministry (*v. 17; hina*, “so that”, a subordinate conjunction of cause or purpose). The phrase, “man of God”, has generally been applied to all Christians, and certainly the scriptures are the only infallible means of equipping anyone for kingdom work, a work not limited to preachers. However, Paul is speaking primarily to Timothy as one who must take his place, and the context of **4: 1-8** indicates that “*every good work*” refers specifically to the work of preaching, reproof, rebuking, and exhorting. The expression is applied over thirty times to Moses and the prophets, including the prophet-king, David (Towner, p. 593; cf. Deut. 33:1; Josh. 14: 6; Ezra 3: 2; 1 Sam. 9: 6-10; 1 Ki 12: 22; 17: 24; 20: 28; 2 Ki 1: 9; Neh. 12: 36).

Living in the 21st century with the availability of concordances, commentaries, computer programs, bible encyclopedias, and counseling manuals, it is difficult to imagine Paul telling Timothy that the OT scriptures *alone* will equip him for every aspect of his ministry. How could

Timothy survive with only his OT? But this is what Paul said. And here I am, writing a short commentary for my African students which I trust will be helpful to them as they navigate through the many responsibilities and trials of ministry. But after all, it is just one more commentary, and they can assuredly survive without it. (But they can't pass my exam without it!) In fact, the church has existed now for 2000 years with relatively few commentaries or seminaries available to ministers of the gospel *in most of the world*. Just imagine what the situation was like before the invention of the printing press by Gutenberg in 1445! Yet, the church has survived and grown even more quickly in the last century in the *developing* world than in the Western world where commentaries, Bible study tools, and seminaries are abundant. Such tools are very helpful, but they are not absolutely essential. Some liberal commentaries are even harmful! If the African pastor, or any pastor in the developing world with few literary resources other than the Bible, will simply devour his Bible like a nursing infant devours milk (1 Pet. 2: 2)—that is, like his life depends upon it, because it does!—the Holy Spirit will make him adequate and equipped for every good work. He will probably never be a famous exegete or theologian, but God will give him what he needs to get the job done.

One of the primary reasons for weakness in the African church and for the growth of error is not really lack of commentaries or formal education, although both are helpful (and I plan to keep teaching and writing). The weakness is caused primarily by the neglect of the Bible, especially by pastors. After having the Scriptures in their own languages—some for over 100 years—many African pastors still don't read them sufficiently. For the African church to assume global leadership—possibly replacing the influence of the Western church which has succumbed to liberalism, postmodernism, and materialism—Africans must study the Bible. While I have heard many Westerners speak as if the African church has become the “epicenter” of the Christian church, I personally have not seen the evidence. Yes, the church in Africa is growing rapidly, but the description of “a mile wide and an inch deep” still applies. Doctrinal and moral purity are still lacking in a church which is generally not hungry for biblical truth, contrary to testimonies of ill-informed Western missionaries who come to Africa for two weeks at a time. (Although I also have to admit my limited experience of nine years in only one country). It is past time for Africans, especially pastors, to blow the dust off their Bibles and begin reading it seriously.

V. Paul's Final Charge to Timothy (4: 1-8)

A. The Motivation to Fulfill the Charge (4: 1)

As a dying man Paul leaves Timothy with a solemn charge to fulfill his duties as a minister of the gospel. In doing so he uses the same formula of 1 Tim. 5: 21 except for the omission of angels. Thus, as in his first letter to Timothy, so now, he *places him under a solemn oath* calling upon God the Father and Christ Jesus to witness Timothy's promise to fulfill his ministry. While frivolous oath-taking is condemned by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5: 33-37), there are occasions which demand a measure of seriousness beyond a simple yes or no. The Apostle Paul used an oath on such occasions in order to call God as a witness to his integrity (Gal. 1: 20; 2 Cor. 11: 31; Rom. 9: 11). Prophetically, Moses called heaven and earth as witnesses against the rebellious Israelites who would refuse to keep the covenant God had made with them at Sinai (Deut. 4: 26; 30: 19). Timothy would immediately recognize the seriousness of the present situation and would understand that a very heavy responsibility was being placed upon his shoulders.

Paul intensifies the charge by placing it within the eschatological framework of the final judgment and the coming of Jesus Christ. Christ will “judge the living and the dead”, namely, those who are alive at His coming and those who have died before His coming. This expression may have already become a commonly used formula (Hendriksen, p. 308; 1 Pet. 4: 5) later incorporated into the Apostles’ Creed. (“He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.”) Thus, death itself will not hide anyone from the piercing eyes of Christ Jesus when He comes to judge men according to their deeds (Matt. 16: 27). As one who would soon take up Paul’s mantle (a figure of speech for authority; cf. 2 Kings 2: 8-14), Timothy knew that his examination before the judgment seat of Christ would be stricter than others (2 Cor. 5: 10; James 3: 1); and he knew from Paul’s own testimony that the possibility of failure was more than a hypothetical (imaginary) possibility (1 Cor. 9: 27; read 1 Cor. 10 for context).

The multitude of images created in Timothy’s mind by this one statement doubtlessly produced fear and trembling at the very thought of fulfilling the responsibilities placed before him; and this is precisely what Paul intended (cf. 2 Cor. 5: 10-11). There was no room for lightness or casualness concerning the task, only dead seriousness. The motivation of godly fear (not craven, debilitating fear) is not generally accepted among many evangelicals who think such motivation beneath the dignity of true believers who should be motivated by love alone. Yet, it appears undeniable that Paul is creating an atmosphere for Timothy that breathes of the impending judgment of Christ, a judgment which Paul and other apostles did not view as a distant event (Rom. 16: 20; 13: 12; Rev. 1: 3; 1 Pet. 4: 5). Indeed, Christ Himself had instructed them always to be ready and about His business when He returned lest they prove to be faithless slaves (Matt. 24: 45-48). This should give pause to those who would rush into the gospel ministry as if it were just another job to put bread on the table. It is more than this. Although the ministerial calling is often despised and treated as insignificant even by those who call themselves Christians, the pastor-teacher holds in his hands the very word of God which pronounces life upon those who heed it and death upon those who refuse it. To the extent that he is faithful to the apostolic message, his teaching is an aroma of life to those who believe or death to those who disbelieve (2 Cor. 2: 14-17).

At the same time, the emotion which Paul intended to produce was not simply fear. There was also a reward promised to those who faithfully fulfilled their duties to Christ and His church. Only a few sentences later Paul says, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and *not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.*” The “appearing” (*epiphaneian*) is the same word used in *v. 1* and refers once again to the future coming of Christ in glory. Thus, Timothy’s emotions should be mixed. On the one hand he should fear the very thought of neglecting anything related to his duties as a minister of the gospel (duties which will be spelled out in the verses which follow) with a view to standing before Christ in judgment. On the other hand, he should also experience the expectation of joy for one who loves Christ and who will be rewarded according to his labors.

B. The Charge (4: 2a)

The charge itself is broken up into five imperatives (commands). Although not intended to be exhaustive of every duty Timothy must perform (cf. **4: 5**, “evangelist”), they are nevertheless the

four which stand out in Paul’s mind as he writes what may be—and was—his last letter to Timothy. The pastor must, therefore, examine his own ministry to see whether he is investing his time and energy in those areas which Paul, the apostle, believed to be the greatest priorities (cf. Acts 6: 4, where Peter and the other apostles expressed their emphasis—prayer and the ministry of the word).

1. Preach the word

The word “preach” (*kērusso*) was originally used to describe the activity of a herald who delivered a public message of great significance.

According to Scripture, then, “***heralding***” or “***preaching***” is generally the divinely authorized proclamation of the message of God to men. It is the exercise of ambassadorship (Hendriksen, p. 309, emphasis his).

There is no particular style of preaching sanctioned in Scripture, and we do well not to “canonize” any particular method of delivery as being the way Jesus or Paul would preach. (In the providence of God, we have no audio or video tapes of either.) The Holy Spirit will use a variety of styles mediated through different personalities. However, we also do well to remember that the messenger of God is not announcing the weather or advertising the price of flour; he is announcing the will of God. Taking this into consideration, the intensity of our delivery should match the importance of the content. If biblical, the sermon is not a message which one can take or leave as he chooses without dire consequences. The very souls of the herald’s audience may be hanging in the balance between heaven and hell depending on whether the Holy Spirit will once again strive with them and grant them the repentance that leads to life. As for those who are believers, the application of the message or the lack thereof will determine the level of spiritual growth bringing either blessing and productive labor or discipline and stagnation. Either way, the word of the Lord does not return to Him void, but accomplishes the purpose for which He sends it, either blessing or cursing (Is. 55: 10-11).

I am reminded of a story about George Whitfield, one of the mightiest preachers of the 18th century. While hearing one of his sermons, Benjamin Franklin (later famous in America’s struggle for independence) was asked by another man whether he believed what Whitfield was saying. “No,” Franklin bluntly replied. “But *he* does.” I think this is the main issue in our delivery of the message of God. Do we preach as if *we* believe what we are saying? If not, how can we convince others to believe it?

The content of preaching is “the word”. Thus, the herald is not at liberty to proclaim *his own message* but that of another, the one who sent him to preach (cf. Rom. 10: 15, where Paul speaks of preaching as the activity of those who are *sent* with a message). Even Christ describes his teaching ministry as that of one who does not speak on his own initiative, but who speaks what He is commanded to say (Jn. 12: 49). The ministry of the Holy Spirit is described likewise (Jn. 16: 13). In the NASB version of John’s gospel, Jesus mentions being *sent* by the Father twenty-seven times, and at the end His earthly ministry tells His disciples, “*as* the Father has sent Me, I *also* send you”, that is, in the same manner (Jn. 20: 21; emphasis mine). Thus, the herald or preacher is one who is sent with a message *not of his own making* but originated by Christ. If Christ and the Holy Spirit did not speak on their own initiative, but spoke what they were commanded to speak, *how much more* must the merely human herald be careful to speak only

what he is commanded to say? Obviously, we cannot apply this principle too rigorously; otherwise, the only thing we would be permitted to do on Sunday morning is read the text of Scripture. But rigorous restraint doesn't seem to be the biggest problem among preachers, but too much freedom to say what they want to say. With many preachers, between the time they announce their text and the end of the sermon, the audience often wonders *what happened to the text* (which appears to have walked out the door), because the content of the sermon bears little resemblance to the text. Great care should be taken in selecting a text of Scripture from which to speak, for once this text is chosen, there is a sense in which the preacher now has his feet tied together. He is not allowed to go anywhere he wants to go. Concerning this point, John Stott has this admonition (*Between Two Worlds*, pp. 125-126; emphasis mine),

To expound Scripture is to bring out of the text *what is there* and expose it to view. The expositor prizes open what appears to be closed, makes plain what is obscure, unravels what is knotted and unfolds what is tightly packed. The opposite of exposition is “imposition”, which is to impose on the text *what is not there*... Whether [the text] is long or short, our responsibility as expositors is to open it up in such a way that it speaks its message clearly, plainly, accurately, relevantly, without addition, subtraction or falsification. In expository preaching the biblical text is neither a conventional introduction to a sermon on a largely different theme, nor a convenient peg on which to hang a *ragbag of miscellaneous thoughts*, but a *master which dictates and controls what is said*....

The very first qualification of expositors is the recognition that we are guardians of a sacred “deposit” of truth, “trustees” of the gospel, “stewards of the mysteries of God”. As Donald Coggan expressed it in his first book on preaching:

The Christian preacher has a boundary set for him. When he enters the pulpit, he is *not an entirely free man*. There is a very real sense in which it may be said of him that the Almighty has set him his bounds that he shall not pass. He is not at liberty to invent or choose his message: it has been committed to him, and it is for him to declare, expound and commend it to his hearers... *It is a great thing to come under the magnificent tyranny of the Gospel!*

The principle summarized above will go far in setting the proper boundaries. When preparing sermons, every preacher should habitually ask himself this question, “What is more important, what **God** is saying to His people through the text or what **I** want to say?” If the former, then most of our time should be spent trying to explain what God is saying, and everything we say—including *relevant* illustrations—should be limited to that singular purpose. Doubtless there is much subjectivism in determining how best to communicate God’s words, but at least this principle will make us self-conscious of the chains wrapped around our feet. Admittedly, the Apostle Paul is not writing Timothy a manual on preaching, but I have a hunch that given the “myth-preaching” and “genealogy-spinning” that was plaguing the church in Ephesus that he would approve good expository preaching and shun everything else. In conclusion of this point, I once had a homiletics professor tell the class that we were allowed to preach a topical sermon (a sermon based on a *subject* rather than a *text*) once every five years, after which we needed to repent and continue preaching expository sermons. Topical sermons do not tie our feet to the text the same way as expository sermons do.

2. *Be ready*

Timothy must be prepared, and the words which follow indicate that Timothy must be prepared *at all times*, when it is convenient, and when it is not convenient. At all times he must be alert to

reprove, rebuke, and exhort, even when the timing does not seem favorable—and it seldom seems favorable. Thus, the imperative, “be ready” modifies the following three imperatives.

3. *Reprove*

Every text of scripture is profitable for reproof, making someone aware of his sin (see above, p. 26). This must be done both in public and private, according to the Lord’s method presented in Matt. 18: 15-20. A good example of public reproof is found in 1 Cor. 5 in which Paul reproves the Corinthian church for failing to discipline a man living in incest with his father’s wife (the man’s stepmother). Thus, Paul is reproofing the Corinthian church for failing to carry out the final step of reproof. Another example is reported in Gal. 2: 11-14 in which Paul gives an account of reproofing Peter before the church in Antioch for shunning fellowship with uncircumcised Gentiles. Public reproof was necessary in both of these instances because the sins committed were public sins. When the sins are private, they should be reproofed in private (cf. my *Synoptic Gospels* on Matt. 18: 15-20, including the context of the whole chapter).

There may be no particular order of importance in the imperatives, although one may argue that preaching, teaching, or the public ministry of the word would naturally come first. Yet it is interesting that reproof comes before encouragement (“exhort”, *parakaleō*) in the list of duties. I am making no other point with this except to say that both public and private reproof, though not enjoyable and often considered unloving, is necessary in the life of a congregation; and if pastors (elders) are unwilling to do this uncomfortable work, they should question their calling as elders. The manner in which reproof is to be done is also of utmost importance (v. **2b**), but even when done properly reproof often arouses intense hostility and accusations of Phariseeism both from the accused and from other members of the congregation (I know from experience.) The natural coping mechanism of many elders is to retreat and dispense (do away) with the nasty business altogether, but this is not a biblical option.

4. *Rebuke*

So what is the difference between “reprove” and “rebuke”? Richard C. Trench distinguishes the words in this way:

One may rebuke another without bringing the rebuked to a conviction of any fault on his part; and this, either because there *was* no fault, and the rebuke was therefore unneeded or unjust; or else because, though there was such fault, the rebuke was ineffectual to bring to the offender to own it; and in this possibility of “rebuking” for sin, without “convincing” of sin, lies the distinction between these two words (*Synonyms of the New Testament*, p. 13, emphasis his).

Trench goes on to mention that while Peter “rebuked” Christ, he did not “convince” (“reprove”) Christ of any sin (Matt. 16: 22, where *epitimaō* is used rather than *elenchō*). Other examples of this difference in meaning include John 8: 46 in which Jesus says, “Which one of you *convicts* [*elenchō*; “reproves”] Me of sin?” Although rebuked for blasphemy and Sabbath-breaking (Matt. 9: 3; John 9: 16), no one was able to “bring sin home to his conscience” simply because He was sinless. The word *elenchō* is also used to describe the effectual work of the Holy Spirit: “And He, when He comes, will *convict* [not simply rebuke] the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16: 8). That is, the Holy Spirit will be successful in convincing sinners of unrighteousness and the need for repentance. He does not come merely to condemn sin.

Thus, the difference in the two imperatives seems to be one of *result*. The result of reproof is to effectually “bring sin home to the conscience”. Rebuke has the connotation (meaning) of declaring a person to be wrong regardless of the result. Whether Timothy is effective or not in convincing someone of their sin, sin must still be rebuked. The result, conviction, is not up to him but in the hands of the Holy Spirit who alone can effectually convince someone of his error.

5. *Exhort*

The word here is *parakaleō* which may be translated “encourage” or “comfort” (cf. 2 Cor. 1: 4; 13: 11; Lk. 16: 25; 1 Thes. 4: 18) or “exhort” (1 Cor. 1: 10; 4: 16; 1 Thes. 4: 1; 2 Thes. 3: 12; Tit. 1: 9; 1 Pet. 5: 1). Thus, the context will determine how the word is being used. Exhortation is future-oriented in that it urges someone to pursue the proper course of behavior, while comfort looks backward to trials or suffering (W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, p. 60). Considering the general context of *v. 2a*, both meanings could be included; but the stressful situation caused by false teachers in Ephesus would favor the use of “exhort”. By accurately handling the scriptures (*2: 15b*), Timothy must move the believers in Ephesus toward maturity (Towner, p. 602).

C. *The Manner of Fulfilling the Charge (4: 2b)*

Towner interprets *v. 2b* as a modifier of the last imperative, “exhort”, (p. 602), but I would prefer to apply it to all four activities of preaching, reproof, rebuking, and exhorting. All of these responsibilities must be carried out “with great patience and instruction” in hope that God would bring those in error to a knowledge of the truth (*2 Tim. 2: 25*). This may be the most difficult part—showing patience toward those who are in error, especially when they are not patient toward you. While Timothy was opposed by outright heretics, the kind of people most pastors face are mentioned in *2: 24-26*, and pastors must restrain themselves against “overkill”—squashing their opponents and their errors, thus “peeling the grape with a carpenter’s hammer”. While the hammer does effectively peel the grape (correct the error), it also leaves quite a mess to clean up afterwards (hurt feelings and grudges) when a more surgical method would have done the job much better. Being a former carpenter, I like hammers; but I have made a lot of mistakes in correcting errors.

D. *The Necessity for the Charge (4: 3-8)*

1. *An apostate church (4: 3-5)*

Especially in light of the present situation, Timothy must diligently perform all of these duties (“For”, *gar*, is explanatory, giving the reason for diligence). Although the situation outlined in *vv. 3-4* is couched (put into words) in the future tense (“For the time *will* come”), it is a present reality. He also describes the conditions of 1 Tim. 4: 1-3 in the future tense, but there were false doctrines presently being taught in Ephesus, including the forbidding of marriage. By using the future, he warns that things will not get better but only worse.

Not willing to endure sound doctrine and wanting to be *entertained rather than instructed*, men will seek out false teachers who will tell them just what they want to hear. What is it about sound doctrine that people are not willing to endure? Perhaps it is boring (tiresome) to them. They want something new and fascinating, something few other people know. Or perhaps they have tried

orthodox theology unsuccessfully with little or no change, and the new teaching offers some *secret* to living the “victorious” Christian life with fewer frustrations. A few simple rules (“Don’t eat this!”) and their lives will then take a turn for the better, a “gospel” much preferred to one which demands a total transformation of life and a radical change in world-view. Whatever the reason, it is rooted in the “desires” of those who are listening for something they *already want*. They will “accumulate” teachers who will affirm (validate or ratify) what they *already believe*. Fundamentally, people desire autonomy—control over their own lives—and they will listen to anyone who will tell them how to achieve this autonomy (Gen. 3). It is not difficult to imagine how the hedonistic form of Gnosticism—escape from the body by indulging its desires (cf. commentary on *1 Timothy*)—fit into this scheme. This form also fit well with the description given in **3: 2-5**, particularly, “lovers of pleasure”.

The modern health and wealth “gospel” is another example. Once God grants sufficient wealth to do what we want and good health to enjoy it, we don’t really need God any more. He has now affirmed who I am as a person; consequently, there is no need for continuing change or transformation into His image, no need to continually seek Him. *Tribal religions* operate in the same way. The gods are sought strictly for giving us what we *desire*—control over our own lives and possibly the lives of others. It is not difficult to see how the health and wealth gospel—which seeks to manipulate God—fits in well with the traditional beliefs of many Africans, even professing Christians whose world-view has not been sufficiently altered by the gospel.

Regardless of the obstacles and discouragements, Timothy must continue doing what is required with a level head and a willingness to endure hardship—the very *opposite qualities* of those who oppose him.

2. Paul’s imminent death (4: 6)

A second reason for the urgency of preaching, reproof, etc. is Paul’s imminent death. Someone must take his place. Paul describes his life in terms of a sacrifice gradually poured out upon the altar, and his suffering was the “filling up” or supplement of the incarnate (in the flesh) ministry of Christ committed to the church (cf. Col. 1: 24). Although there was nothing incomplete or lacking in the sacrifice of Christ for atonement, there was much left to be done to proclaim this atoning sacrifice to the world. The drink offering consisted of wine or strong drink which accompanied a grain or animal sacrifice (Num. 15: 1-10; 28: 7). Paul uses this drink offering in a metaphorical way to describe his life’s blood as a sacrifice poured out upon the altar and accompanying the ultimate sacrifice of Christ (Towner, pp. 610-611). So also Hendriksen, who says,

Since the wine was gradually poured out, was an offering, and was the final act of the entire sacrificial ceremony, it pictured most adequately the gradual ebbing away of Paul’s life, the fact that he was presenting this life to God as an offering, and the idea that while he viewed his entire career of faith as “a living sacrifice” (Rom. 12: 1; cf. 15: 16), he looked upon the present stage of this career as being the final sacrificial act (p. 313).

Paul had used this imagery before during his first imprisonment in Rome (Phil. 2: 17), but while the possibility of his martyrdom was unlikely then, it was now certain (“the time of my departure has come”). He was about to make the final installment of his life as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12: 1).

Every Christian is urged to live his life as a “living sacrifice”, but what does this imply? The animal sacrifices in the OT were representative of the *whole* person who belonged to God, and the life of the animal was given as a substitute for the *life* of the person. This was symbolized by the laying of hands upon the animal to depict the transfer of guilt from the person to the animal (Lev. 1: 1-5). The grain offering represented the person’s labor *in its entirety*. Thus, a man’s whole life and all the fruits of his labor belonged to God and not to himself. Kellogg explains the relationship between these two sacrifices.

But although the meal-offering [the grain-offering], like the burnt-offering [one form of animal sacrifice] was an offering made to God by fire, the differences between them were many and significant. In the burnt-offering, it was always a life that was given to God; in the meal-offering, it was never a life, but always the products of the soil. In the burnt-offering, again, the offerer always set apart the offering by the laying on of the hand, signifying thus, as we have seen [Lev. 1: 1-5], a transfer of obligation to death for sin; thus connecting with the offering, in addition to the idea of a gift to God, that of expiation for sin, as preliminary to the offering by fire. In the meal offering, on the other hand, there was no laying on of the hand, as there was no shedding of blood, so that the idea of expiation for sin is in no way symbolized. The conception of a gift to God, which, though dominant in the burnt-offering, is not in that the only thing symbolized, in the meal-offering becomes the *only* thought the offering expresses.

It is further to be noted that not only must the meal-offering consist of the products of the soil, but of such alone as grow, not spontaneously, but by cultivation, and thus represent the result of man’s labour...As the burnt-offering represented the consecration [total dedication] of the life, the person, to God, so the meal-offering represented the consecration of the fruit of his labours...

Not only, in general, are we to surrender our persons without reserve to the Lord, as in the burnt-offering, but unto Him must also be consecrated all our works...

There are many who consecrate, or think they consecrate, their religious activities; but seem never to have understood that the consecration of the true Israelite [and now the Christian] must cover the secular life as well—the labour of the hand in the field, in the shop, the transactions of the office...and all their results, as also the recreations which we are able to command, the very food and drink which we use—in a word, all the results and products of our labours, even in secular things. And to bring this idea vividly before Israel, it was ordered that the meal-offering should consist of food, as the most common and universal visible expression of the fruit of man’s secular activities. The New Testament has the same thought (1 Cor. 10: 31): “Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” (S. H. Kellogg, *The Book of Leviticus*, pp. 64-68; emphasis his, words in brackets mine).

In the New Covenant, the finished sacrifice of Christ has been offered once for all to atone for the sins of His people; therefore, there is no longer any need for dead, bloody sacrifices. However, there is a continuing obligation for *living* sacrifices represented by the grain offering—the symbol of life and labor, not death. Speaking to Christian slaves in Colossae and Ephesus, Paul says that the most common, menial labor will be rewarded if done for Christ (Col. 3: 22-24; Eph. 6: 5-8). Although Paul’s labor was primarily the ministry of preaching, evangelism, and church planting, he did not separate life into the sacred and the secular. All of life, and every labor of man’s hands, should be consecrated to God. The life of the believer is a living and holy sacrifice. Commenting on Rom. 12: 1, John Murray remarks,

But it is not this body of sin or sinful body that they are to present as a living sacrifice. Romans 6: 13 is the index to Paul’s meaning here: “Neither present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead and your members instruments of righteousness to God”. It is a body alive from the dead that the believer is to present, alive from the dead because the body of sin has been destroyed. The body to be presented is a

member of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 6: 15, 19). It is possible that the word “living” also reflects on the permanence of this offering, that it must be a constant dedication (*Romans*, p. 111).

E. Further Motivation to Fulfill the Charge (4: 7-8)

Paul now moves from the metaphor of sacrifice to athlete. He has no regrets about his life’s labors, for he has fought well and has finished the race that Christ set before him on the road to Damascus. He has kept the faith (1 Cor. 9: 26; Acts 9: 15-16; 22: 10; 26: 14-18; Heb. 12: 1). There were occasions in his ministry when Paul spoke of his work in less definite terms, as if there was the potential for failure (1 Cor. 9: 27; Gal. 2: 2; 4: 11; Phil. 2: 14-16; 3: 11-12). There is no uncertainty here, and Paul uses four verbs in the perfect tense—“have fought”, “have finished”, “have kept”, “have loved”—verbs which view the action as a finished product with continuing results in the present and future. He has completed the ministry entrusted to him. Therefore, Paul immediately shifts Timothy’s attention away from any morbid thoughts of his death to the certainty of the reward awaiting him; but not only for him, but for all those who have loved Christ’s appearing. This is the second motivation for Timothy to fulfill his ministry.

What is the nature of this reward? First, it is a future reward to be given “on that day”, the day of Christ’s second appearing. The verb “have loved” in *v. 8* is a perfect participle which could imply that the appearing mentioned is the *first* appearing of Christ and not the *second*. However, the context of the verse is clearly the eschatological return of Christ, the second appearing—“that day”.

Second, the reward is a “crown of righteousness”. Paul mentions two kinds of crowns in his epistles—first, the people who have come to know Christ through his ministry who will one day stand before Christ at His second coming (Phil. 4: 1; 1 Thes. 2: 19); and second, the crown of righteousness mentioned here. James mentions a “crown of life” promised to those who love Christ and who persevere under trial (James 1: 12). Peter promises a “crown of glory” given to elders who faithfully shepherd the flock which will be awarded “when the Chief Shepherd Appears” (1 Pet. 5: 4; another reference to the *time* when this reward will be given). In *Revelation*, Christ promises the “crown of life” to those who endure severe persecution (Rev. 2: 10). In each of the uses above, either the immediate context or the broader context of the epistle, suffering and trial is evident (see also Phil. 1: 29; 1 Pet. 1: 6). Paul is imploring (pleading with) Timothy to embrace the suffering of the gospel ministry in the same way he has endured this suffering. If he accepts this challenge, he can expect the crown of righteousness at the return of Christ.

Are all the crowns mentioned in these passages the same? Is the “crown of righteousness” also the “crown of life”, or does it imply an *additional* reward for faithful service? Will all believers be given the *same* reward of eternal life, and *no other*, regardless of what they have done or have failed to do for Christ in this life. This is a common conclusion from the parable of the laborers in the vineyard in which each worker receives the *same* pay, regardless of how long or how hard he worked (Matt. 20: 1-16). *Verse 7* speaks of an athletic contest—“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith”—therefore, it would seem natural to interpret the crown of righteousness in terms of the victor’s crown in the athletic games. The one who competes and wins is the one who receives the prize. Paul speaks of winning the prize in 1 Cor. 9: 23-27, and at the end of this text he says, “but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so

that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.” Was Paul fearful of losing eternal life or was he fearful of losing an additional reward?

At the end of 1 Cor. 9: 27, the NIV adds the prepositional phrase “for the prize”, a phrase not found in Greek manuscripts, thus making the verse read, “. . .I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified *for the prize*.” The translators have added the phrase as an interpretive remark; and although I generally shun such additions, I believe it clarifies the meaning. Paul was not seriously speculating about the possibility of losing his salvation; otherwise, how could he say to Timothy, “for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day” (1: 12b)? Can we suggest that now that Paul is at the end of his life, he has *sufficient accumulated works* to give him confidence, although such confidence was lacking earlier in his ministry? Further, can we suggest that Paul did not *fully* know whom he believed until the very end? The answer to both questions is obvious—no! It is very likely that the “prize” in 1 Cor. 9: 24 corresponds to the “reward” of 1 Cor. 3: 8, 14 (*misthos*, cf. Matt. 5: 12; Rom. 4: 4, “wage”; 1 Cor. 9: 18). Admittedly, he is using two different metaphors in chapter 3, that of a farmer and a builder, not the metaphor of the Greek games. Yet, he is speaking of those who are ministers of the gospel or leaders in the church whose work in the gospel will be examined at the final judgment (so also Gordon D. Fee, *1 Corinthians*, p. 145).

“Each [person] will receive his own reward according to his own labor” (1 Cor. 3: 8); thus, there is a difference in the reward given to one man as opposed to another, depending upon what he has done. Every individual will build on the one foundation laid down by the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 3: 10), but they will build with different materials—some with gold, silver, and precious stones (good teaching); others with wood, hay, and straw (defective teaching) (v. 12). At the final judgment (“the Day”), each one’s work will be tested with fire (v. 13). If his work survives the test, he will receive a “reward” (*misthos*); but if his work is burned up, he will suffer the *loss* of a reward. He will still be saved, but as though escaping a burning building (v. 15). Thus, the “reward” in 1 Cor. 3: 8, 14 cannot be *salvation*, since the one who built with the wrong materials *loses* this reward but is still saved. What this reward actually consists of is left unexplained, even as Paul leaves the “crown of righteousness” unexplained in 2 Tim. 4: 8.

The incentive of rewards and the threat of punishment frequently occur in Paul’s writings.

Eph. 6: 7-8—“With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one [*hekastos*] does, this he will receive back [paid back, *komizō*] from the Lord, whether slave or free.”

1 Cor. 15: 58—“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord.”

2 Cor. 9: 6—“Now this *I say*, he who *sows sparingly* will also *reap sparingly*, and he who *sows bountifully* will also *reap bountifully*.”

2 Cor. 5: 10—“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one [*hekastos*] may be recompensed [*komizō*] for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

Col. 3: 25—“For he who does wrong will receive [*komizō*] the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.”

1 Cor. 3:8—“Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each [*hekastos*] will receive his own reward [*misthos*, wages] according to his own labor.”

Rom. 2:5-8—“But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who WILL RENDER [*apodidōmi*] TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.

2 Tim. 4:8—“in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award [*apodidōmi*] to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

2 Tim. 4:14—“Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay [*apodidōmi*] him according to his deeds.”

This is entirely consistent with the teachings of Jesus in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 10: 31-46). The sheep are rewarded on the basis of good deeds and the goats are condemned on the basis of the neglect of good deeds or apathy to the needs of others. Furthermore, the didactic teaching of Christ confirms this emphasis.

Matt. 16:26-27—“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY [*apodidōmi*] EVERY MAN [*hekastos*] ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.

Matt. 5:10-12 “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward [*misthos*] in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matt. 6: 17-20—“But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward [*apodidōmi*] you. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But *store up* for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal.” (emphasis mine)

Matt. 5: 46—“For if you love those who love you, what reward [*misthos*] do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

Matt. 10:41—“He who receives a prophet in *the* name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward [*misthos*]; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward [*misthos*].”

Matt. 19:29—“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name’s sake, will receive many times as much, **and** will inherit eternal life.” (emphasis mine)

Some of the above texts speak of final distinctions between believers and unbelievers (e.g. Matt. 25: 31-46; Matt. 16: 27); but others the distinctions between believers and other believers (e.g. 2 Cor. 9: 6; Col. 3: 25; 2 Cor. 5: 10; Eph. 6: 7-8; 1 Cor. 3: 8; 15: 58; Matt. 6: 17-20). Further, some texts speak of the reward of eternal life (Rom. 2: 5-8) while others speak of a reward other than eternal life given to the individual believer for some specific good deed (Eph. 6: 7-8; Matt. 6: 17-20; Matt. 19: 29). Can it be said that the believer can “store up” more eternal life in heaven? Thus, the “treasures” Jesus is speaking of and the “many times as much” are something in addition to eternal life.

Even the parable of the laborers in the field (Matt. 20: 1-16) is told to answer Peter’s question in Matt. 19: 27, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?” Rather than scolding Peter for his question, Jesus responds with a promise, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (19: 28). This promise is made specifically to the twelve disciples (excluding Judas) and pertains to the reward of authority in the consummated kingdom (John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, p. 284). Jesus mentions only *twelve* thrones, not one for every glorified believer, followed by other rewards to any who have made special sacrifices (19: 29). On the other hand, the parable also establishes the important truth that even these rewards are granted on the basis of grace, not merit. Peter and the other disciples believed that they were now somehow *entitled* to Christ’s rewards, but in this they were mistaken. **Every reward is granted on the basis of grace**, for every good thing we do is the direct result of the gifts God has granted us and the inward enablement of the Holy Spirit (Phil. 2: 12-13) (cf. my *Synoptic Gospels*, p. 281 and D.A. Carson, *Matthew*, p. 428).

Getting back to *2 Timothy*, I believe that Paul is giving Timothy an incentive (motivation) beyond the general promise of eternal life; otherwise, it would not have served the purpose of an incentive. Although the threat of apostasy was always present even in Timothy’s life—as it had been demonstrated in others—**Paul was not encouraging Timothy to persevere in the ministry in order to receive eternal life**. Further, there would be many believers in the church of Ephesus who would one day receive the reward of eternal life who would never have to endure the hardship that Paul and Timothy endured. Likewise, there will be many formerly wealthy believers in heaven who attempted to store up far too many treasures on earth and far too few treasures in heaven. They will be saved in the final judgment, but they will look back with sorrow on lost opportunities for serving others. Some believers are more faithful in prayer than others and will be rewarded accordingly for sacrificing time, sleep, and the pursuit of entertainment for more time spent in prayer. It would seem self-evident that if there are degrees of punishment in hell (Matt. 11: 23-24), there are also special rewards in heaven. But we should also keep in mind that the greatest in the kingdom of heaven will be the servant of all.

He [Christ] is the inheritance of every believer. If there are differences of degree, they are differences of intimacy with the Lord himself. If some glorified saints lie closer than others to God’s heart, no one else will be jealous or angry, for the eternal kingdom excludes such emotions. Rather, the lesser members of that kingdom will rejoice at the greater blessings given to others, and those who are greatest will serve the lesser—beginning with the Lord himself, as Jesus says in Luke 12: 37,

“Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.” Who would not want as much intimacy as possible with such a wonderful Lord? Here is a reward that profoundly motivates holiness of heart and life (John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, p. 285).

VI. Concluding Requests and Warning (4: 9-22)

A. Visit Me Soon (4: 9-13).

Paul still hopes that before his execution Timothy will be able to visit him in Rome. It will require courage for Timothy to associate himself with a condemned criminal, but Paul has already given honorable mention of Onesiphorus who had not been ashamed of his chains (**1: 16**) and now mentions Luke who is present in Rome with him (v. **11**, although not imprisoned). Others had also been helpful including Crescens, Titus, Mark, and Tychicus.

Demas (Col. 4: 14; Philemon, v. 24), on the other hand, had deserted Paul for “this present world”. “This present world” could be a reference to a safer and more comfortable life isolated from persecution and hardship (cf. 1 Tim. 6: 17), but Demas’ actions do not necessarily prove that he abandoned the faith altogether (cf. Towner, pp. 622-623). John Mark had also deserted Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey but had later proven himself (cf. Acts 12: 25; 13: 5, 13; 15: 36-40). Through the encouragement of his cousin Barnabas, the “Son of Encouragement” (Acts 4: 36), as well as Peter (1 Pet. 5: 13; also early church tradition, especially Papias, AD 140), Mark had become an exemplary laborer in the kingdom who later authored *The Gospel of Mark*. Having deserted Paul and Barnabas on their first journey even before the persecution had really begun, Mark has by now proven himself sufficiently courageous to help Paul, the condemned prisoner in Rome. We should never write someone off as useless without sufficient evidence. He may have failed miserably, but through the encouragement of others he can be restored to useful service. Was not Peter himself a failure who was restored to become the leader of the apostles?

There were other co-workers who had also deserted Paul in his first defense (**1: 15; 4: 16**), but he prays for their forgiveness and does not put them into the same category as Alexander the coppersmith who had done him much harm and had opposed his teaching (see below).

The difference between Paul’s first imprisonment and this one is implied in his request for a “cloak” (v. **13**), an outer garment also useful for keeping one warm at night. While relatively comfortable in his “rented quarters” during his first imprisonment (cf. Acts 28: 30), the dark, damp dungeon for prisoners condemned to die was less accommodating. He will especially need it before the winter months (v. **21**). But more important than the cloak were “the parchments”, possibly copies of the OT from which he received comfort and encouragement. To the very end Paul was a man who never ceased learning.

B. Watch Out for Those Who Oppose the Gospel (4: 14-15).

Alexander the coppersmith harmed Paul in some way not disclosed here or elsewhere in the NT; however, he may have presented false accusations leading to Paul’s arrest and *second* imprisonment in Rome (Towner, pp. 630-631). Quite plausibly (believably) he is the same man

as the Alexander mentioned in 1 Tim. 1: 19-20, and his excommunication from the church (“handed over to Satan”; cf. 1 Cor. 5: 5) would intensify his opposition against Paul and anyone (Timothy) associated with Paul (Towner, p. 634). Furthermore, a metalworkers guild was located in Troas where Alexander was likely to be residing, and Timothy must pass through Troas to pick up Paul’s cloak and parchments from Carpus (v. 13; Towner, p. 631). Consequently, Timothy must watch out for this man lest he, too, become a victim to his schemes (v. 15).

Once again, Paul is not hesitant about naming names. Timothy and others must be warned about those who are dangerous to individual believers and to the gospel, and it is not a sign of humility or godliness to withhold useful information from someone who might be harmed because of their ignorance. (If someone who is a known thief were moving in next door to me, I would have a right to know!) Anyone who persists in his wicked ways will have to suffer the loss of his reputation. This is not slander or gossip, but just recompense for his sins.

As Paul will be awarded (*apodidōmi*) a crown of righteousness, so also Alexander will be repaid (*apodidōmi*) “according to his deeds”—an imprecation against anyone opposing the truth (cf. Ps. 27: 4). (For a discussion of imprecatory psalms and their continuing legitimacy, see my *Hermeneutics*, “Interpreting the Psalms”, p. 93).

C. Don’t Worry about Me; I’m in Good Hands (4: 16-18)

At Paul’s *first defense* in Rome, some of his associates had failed to show up for the trial (**1: 15** is a possible reference to this first defense). The difficulty lies in determining the timing of this event. Hendriksen believes that Paul is reminiscing (speaking about past events) about the events of his first Roman imprisonment years earlier (Acts 28) from which he had been released (p. 326). From this perspective, it is much easier to interpret what Paul means in v. 17. After his release from the first Roman imprisonment—delivered from the lion’s mouth of Roman execution—Paul was able to continue his missionary journeys (none of which are recorded in Acts) possibly as far as Spain (Rom. 15: 24, 28). In his letter to the Philippians written during this imprisonment he voiced his conviction that he had further work to do and would be able to see them once again (Phil 1: 22-26). During these additional missionary journeys he was able to complete his proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles so that he could now declare his work “fully accomplished”.

Towner, on the other hand, believes that the context demands a more proximate (near at hand) interpretation of this “first defense” consisting of a preliminary hearing determining whether there were sufficient grounds for an actual trial. Thus, Paul is not reminiscing in **4: 16** but talking about a *recent* abandonment by his associates (pp. 635-637). This interpretation presents a more difficult challenge to interpreting v. 17. How can Paul say that he was “rescued out of the lion’s mouth” if he was still in prison awaiting execution; and how can he claim that his proclamation to the Gentiles was “fully accomplished” through a preliminary hearing which resulted in further imprisonment? Towner attempts to get around this difficulty by suggesting that Paul is speaking of his rescue in a very limited, spiritual sense as the opportunity “to make a ‘defense’ at all (in which he proclaimed the gospel), after which the trial [hearing?] turned ugly” (p. 645, word in brackets mine). Furthermore, Paul considered his mission to the Gentiles accomplished by the very fact that he had been able to proclaim the gospel in Rome, the “symbolic cosmopolitan center of ‘the nations’ (Acts 23: 11)...” (pp. 643-644). But neither of these explanations is

convincing (or new), and Hendriksen addresses this mode of interpretation with a lengthy refutation (pp. 328-330).

The reader can take his pick as to which interpretation is most reasonable. I personally prefer the traditional interpretation dating back to Eusebius. At the end of his life, Paul remembers that first Roman imprisonment when his life *could* have ended in execution. But it didn't. He had further work to do in proclaiming Christ to the Gentiles, even planning a trip to Spain. Like Daniel he had been placed into the lion's den, so to speak, through the false accusations of the Jews and from which he had been delivered to continue his mission. He foresees no such physical rescue from the present situation, but the Lord has a different kind of deliverance in mind. Paul will soon be in the presence of Christ in the heavenly kingdom, and one day he will receive his glorified body from which not a hair of his head will have perished (Lk. 21: 18).

Regardless of how the "first defense" is interpreted, the whole complex of events found in vv. **14-18** closely resembles that surrounding the crucifixion of Christ (Towner, p. 641)—betrayed by a close associate turned enemy, deserted by former co-workers, legally examined by Romans, and finally executed. ***Paul was following the same path of suffering as His Savior before him.*** Through it all, the Lord stood by him even as God the Father stood by His Son, and at the end received His spirit into His hands (Lk. 23: 46). Paul expects no less and knows that he is in good hands.

D. Greet the Brethren (4: 19-21).

As always, Paul acknowledges the significance and worth of those who have been "yokefellows" (Phil. 4: 3, KJV) with him in the gospel. One question emerges. In light of the greetings of Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, and Claudia sent by this letter, why did Paul say just a few verses earlier, "Only Luke is with me" (v. **11**)? The difficulty is overcome if we interpret "only Luke" as the only member of Paul's *mission team* who had not been dispatched to another location (Towner, pp. 624, 655).

E. May the Lord Be with You (4: 22).

See Col. 4: 18; 1 Tim. 6: 21; 2 Tim. 4: 22; Titus, 3: 15 as well as other Pauline benedictions.

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