

03. 2 Timothy 1:3-18



2 Timothy 1:3-4

I am grateful to God, whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did, when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy.

Paul follows the address with the customary expression of thanks in which he introduces what are to be central themes of the letter. He is longing to see Timothy. This is a letter from a man who is capable of offering deep friendship and who has a deep need to receive it. We are reminded of his words to his dear friends in Philippi: ‘I yearn for all of you with the affection of the Messiah Jesus’ (Philippians 1:8). He wrote to the Thessalonians: ‘Timothy has just now come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love. He has told us also that you always remember us kindly and long to see us – just as we long to see you’ (1 Thessalonians 3:6).

This capacity and need for friendship is a measure of the pain caused him by his being rejected by the bulk of his fellow Christian Jews who distrusted him. In spite of the decrees of the Jerusalem Assembly, a determined group continued to follow him around, insisting that the observance of the Jewish law was essential for anyone wishing to receive the salvation offered by God through the Jewish Messiah, Jesus. This was a ‘thorn in the flesh’ (2 Corinthians 12:7) of this zealous missionary who saw in his fidelity to his mission a way of carrying to the world the faith of ‘**my ancestors**’. Paul will keep coming back to the intimate bond that he shares with Timothy (see 1:8,12; 2:3-13; 3:10-12; 4:5-8), a bond of deep affection and of shared faith. It is not difficult to imagine how encouraged Timothy would have been to hear Paul assure him of his prayers and to know that Paul is confident in his faith.

2 Timothy 1:3

I am grateful to God, whom I worship with a clear conscience

Paul assured the Romans: ‘I worship God (λατρεύω) with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son’ (Romans 1:9). In assuring Timothy here that he worships God ‘**with a clear conscience**’, he is not claiming to be sinless. He writes elsewhere: ‘The Messiah Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the foremost’ (1 Timothy 1:15). Against those who are using his imprisonment as proof that he is out of favour with God, he is assuring Timothy that, whatever his faults, he has been faithful to the commission given him and that it is the faith of his ancestors that he has been preaching.

2 Timothy 1:4-5

Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.

It is Timothy's faith that means everything to Paul, for it is faith that is our bond with Jesus. Paul's memories go back to his first visit to Timothy's home town, Lystra (Acts 16:1-2), some twenty years previously (Acts 14:8-18), and the faith that 'lived in' (ἐνῳκεῖν) his grandmother and mother. Faith is the gift of the Holy Spirit who makes a home in our hearts and in our lives.

Through faith we welcomed God's offer of love. It is through faith 'in him', that we were 'marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit' (Ephesians 1:13). 'By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God' (Ephesians 2:8). It is 'through faith' that Christ dwells in our hearts (Ephesians 3:17).

Faith (πίστις) speaks of listening to God, heeding God's inspiration, and acting accordingly. The verb especially focuses on the dynamic movement of our actual relating with God. Far from being a speculative, cerebral thing, faith is essentially practical. It is fundamentally about action.

To speak of 'faith' is to speak of the truth about God's self-revelation through his activity in the world, reaching its climax in God's self-revelation in Jesus. It is to speak of the decisions we make, and the lifestyle to which we are committed as a consequence of taking this revelation seriously.

When we speak of human beings having this quality, we are saying that they are trustworthy because what they do and say is in accordance with the truth. If we seek the truth (Jeremiah 5:1,3), and deal honestly and carry out our obligations (2 Chronicles 31:12), then we share in the faithfulness of the Lord, and others in turn can rely upon us (Jeremiah 15:18). Abraham is described as having a faithful heart (Nehemiah 9:8), and Moses is spoken of as being trustworthy because of the intimacy of God's communication with him (Numbers 12:7). We hear of a faithful priest (1 Samuel 2:35) and a trustworthy prophet (1 Samuel 3:20). The city is spoken of as being faithful (Isaiah 1:21,26), witnesses as being reliable (Isaiah 8:2), and a supply of water as being sure (Isaiah 33:16).

When we come to the Hebrew verb 'mn we find, as we would expect, that it means to act in accordance with who we are and with our obligations. It means to behave faithfully with the result that others can rely upon us. Since we are creatures who are totally dependent upon God, for us to behave in a way that is truly in accordance with our nature means to live in dependence upon God. This includes placing our trust in God's faithfulness.

The verb 'believe' then has two essential components. It means to place our trust in God's faithfulness and to give evidence of this by behaving faithfully ourselves so that others can rely upon us.

Jesus is portrayed as having perfect faith. He always acts towards God as Son, in perfect trust and obedience. In doing so he reveals who God is for us and how we are to respond to grace. He is our 'leader in faith' (Hebrews 12:2).

We have faith when, in accordance with who we are as creatures totally dependent on God, we listen to Jesus' word and open our hearts to receive the sharing in his intimate life of love with the Father which he offers us. To do so we will need to trust him. We will also need to live faithfully the life he offers us, not independently, but as people who are 'born of God' (John 1:13), like branches which draw their life from the vine to which they remain attached (John 15:1ff).

To be-lieve is to choose to be in God's love (lieve), receiving with an open heart the love which God is, the love which the risen Jesus enjoys in the eternal mystery of God's being and which he offers to us by pouring his Spirit into our hearts. To have faith is to let this divine communion transform us so that our lives, too, become radiant reflections of God's love reaching out to others and inviting them into the same shared communion.

To believe is:

- to listen to God's word as revealed in Jesus.
- to heed what God says 'when God was pleased to reveal his Son to me', trusting that God is faithful and so accepting his word as true with our hearts and minds, our soul and strength.
- to live in communion with Jesus, sharing his life of love and so sharing his faith – the faithfulness (fullness of faith) of God which Jesus incarnates and reveals.
- to act in accordance with God's will as revealed by Jesus, especially by living a life of love.

2 Timothy 1:6-7

For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift (χάρισμα) of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of good judgment.

‘Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders’ (1 Timothy 4:14).

So it was that one day words of prophecy were pronounced in the assembly, and the ‘council of the elders’ (πρεσβυτερίον) laid hands on Timothy, recognising that Christ had chosen him and given him a special ‘gift’ (χαρίσμα) for leadership in the community.

As Paul assured the Romans, ‘the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable’ (Romans 11:29).

Timothy's teaching and exercise of authority will certainly be effective, for its power to convince, to convert and to inspire does not come from him but from God. It is God's word that he is sent to teach, and God himself is the source of its power. As Paul reminded the Thessalonians: 'Our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction' (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

The power given to Timothy is the power of the Spirit, the power of God, the power exercised by Jesus. It is therefore a power that is expressed in love. It is also a power that is characterised as σωφρονισμός. This is a quality which is highly prized by the Greek moral philosophers. However, it has been ‘Christened’ by Paul. It concerns the way we think (hence φρον) as a result of the salvation (hence the ‘σω’) which is Christ’s gift. It is thinking that flows from being in communion with God. In short, it is having ‘the mind of Christ’ (Philippians 2:5). What Timothy has to do is ‘live by the Spirit’ and allow himself to be ‘guided by the Spirit’ (Galatians 5:25).

2 Timothy 1:8

Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God.

Paul is suffering because he has been faithful to his commission to preach the gospel. The gospel is about ‘the power of God’, but not in the way that people expect. The power of God is the power of love, and the paradox of the gospel is that this powerful, healing, redeeming and saving love is expressed in ‘Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles’ (1 Corinthians 1:23).

Paul was ridiculed for believing as he did and for proclaiming it as good news, but, as he said to the Romans: ‘I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith’ (Romans 1:16). Timothy has experienced suffering, too, and for the same reason. Paul is offering his own example to encourage him.

(On suffering in the life of a disciple see the following presentation)

2 Timothy 1:9

God saved us and called us with a holy calling

God's call is 'holy' because it comes from God the Holy One, and also because it is a call to live a life of holiness in communion with God. We recall Paul's plea to the Gentile churches: 'I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called' (Ephesians 4:1).

2 Timothy 1:9

God saved us and called us with a holy calling not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace.

God's call, as Paul keeps insisting, is not in response to the good things which we do, nor can we earn it. It is a grace and the initiative is entirely from God. 'By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — not the result of works, so that no one may boast' (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Since Timothy did not merit it by his goodness, he need not fear that any weakness of his will cause it to be revoked. From God's side the call stands. Certainly we can fail to respond, but we need never fear that God will revoke the call or take away the power and the love that will enable us to carry it out. All this is 'in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in the Messiah Jesus our Lord' (Ephesians 3:11).

2 Timothy 1:9-10

This grace was given to us in the Messiah Jesus before the ages began, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, the Messiah Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

That God's eternal design for humankind has been revealed in Jesus is central to the gospel. To the Colossians Paul speaks of 'the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed' (Colossians 1:26).

Death has been rendered ineffective in that physical death cannot take from us the life of communion with God who 'alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light' (1 Timothy 6:16).

2 Timothy 1:11-12

For this and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him (or ‘what he has entrusted to me’).

The call Paul received was to be ‘a herald and an apostle and a teacher’ of the gospel. Timothy has been commissioned to carry on this mission. It brings suffering with it, but Paul is confident that what Jesus and he have entrusted to each other (his ‘deposit’ (παράθεκη) is in safe hands. Paul is ‘fully convinced that God is able to do what he has promised’ (Romans 4:21).

2 Timothy 1:13

Hold to the example of the sound word (λόγος) that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in the Messiah Jesus.

In the First Letter to Timothy, Paul spoke of his life as a persecutor of the church, and added; ‘I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus the Messiah might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life’ (1 Timothy 1:16). Once again Paul is offering himself to Timothy as an example, not now as a sinner whom God has generously forgiven, but as a teacher who has given to Timothy the healing, life-giving ‘word’ which he is to hand on to others.

We are reminded of Paul's insistence to Titus of the kind of qualities needed by a person who is appointed as a leader in the community: 'He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it' (Titus 1:9).

2 Timothy 1:13

in the faith and love that are in the Messiah Jesus.

The kind of holding fast that Paul is asking of Timothy can only be done 'in faith and love'. The love of God that is revealed in Jesus is not something that can be grasped and memorised by human intelligence. It can be known only in the intimacy of communion that is faith. It can be known and handed on only by one who loves. The gospel is about God who is love. What is handed on cannot be true if it is not loving, nor can it be loving if it is not true.

2 Timothy 1:13

in the faith and love that are in the Messiah Jesus.

Words are important, as are the formulas of faith that have been refined in order to give a true, though necessarily imperfect, expression to the mystery. Orthodoxy, however, is more than fidelity to the right formulas. It is living a life of ‘faith and love’ – the faith and love ‘that are in the Messiah Jesus’. It is the faith of Jesus that we share. It is his love that we receive and give to others.

2 Timothy 1:14

Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

Once again, Paul refers to something that has been entrusted (see 1:12). This time he is speaking of the gospel (‘the good treasure’) which Jesus, through the Holy Spirit has entrusted to Timothy. It is something which Timothy can ‘guard’ only through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, ‘because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us’ (Romans 5:5).

2 Timothy 1:15-18

You are aware that all who are in Asia have turned away from me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain; when he arrived in Rome, he eagerly searched for me and found me – may the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! And you know very well how much service (διακονεω) he rendered in Ephesus.

The implication of what Paul writes here is that his imprisonment is quite different from the one described by Luke in the concluding chapter of Acts. This time he is wearing chains, and the Christian community in Rome is seemingly unaware of his whereabouts. It took a lot of persevering effort and courage on the part of Onesiphorus to search him out.