



An Introduction to the Pastoral Epistles and Paul's second letter to Timothy

By Jonathan Phipps

Introduction

Life is filled with many joys and many struggles. At times our problems can become so heavy that we can drift from the paths to which God calls us. At other times responsibilities can overwhelm us and we just want to throw in the towel. In the early days of the church, the seasoned leader, Paul, gave his final message to his young friend Timothy to encourage him to press on in the ministry of the gospel. Sensing that the end of his life was near, Paul longed to see Timothy again, but even more he wanted to see the gospel lived out vibrantly in his life. This would require endurance, for Paul knew that amidst many joys also comes a cost in following Christ. When inevitable difficulties came, Paul did not want Timothy to despair or quit on the message of the cross. No, when suffering came, Paul wanted Timothy to thrive and endure...to walk on with Jesus.

Last fall we journeyed through the Gospel of Mark and looked at the story of the most extraordinary man who ever lived. As we moved through different *Signposts* from the life of Jesus it became clear that our lives only really make sense when they are seen in light of his. The good news of Jesus' atoning work on the cross and his subsequent resurrection is not just the starting point of our faith, but the truth that we must continually press into. We must never get over the gospel of grace or think that we have plumbed the depths of its significance. There is no moving on from the cross of Christ, only walking in its shadow. The Apostle Paul never got over what he knew to be true about what Jesus had done for him, and this motivated him as he preached the gospel all over the known world. Like Paul, Jesus calls us to walk with him on mission, serving those in deepest need and proclaiming his name both near and far.

The Pastoral Epistles

First Timothy, Second Timothy and Titus comprise what are commonly referred to as the Pastoral Epistles.¹ Except for Philemon, all of Paul's other letters were addressed to churches, whereas these were written to individuals and fellow laborers of the missionary. All three of the letters have similar conceptual content and carry the primary purpose of exhorting these young associates in their leadership responsibilities. These letters have been seen as a

¹ For a more in-depth discussion of the varying genres of the New Testament see *An Introduction to the New Testament* by Reid S. Monaghan.

group as far back as the 2nd century, however, the designation “Pastoral Epistles” has only been in use since the mid 1700’s.²

Timothy and Titus were not “permanent-resident pastors” of local congregations, but were rather Paul’s “apostolic delegates” temporarily assigned to certain locations to help lead, organize and settle potential problems.³ Timothy was very near and dear to the heart of Paul. He met Paul in his home town of Lystra (in Modern Turkey) when he was a teenager, during Paul’s first visit there (Acts 14:8-20). It is likely that Paul was instrumental in his conversion, which is why he might consider him like a son (1 Cor 4:17). Timothy’s father was a gentile and his mother a Jew, and we know that he had been taught the Scriptures since his childhood (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). Young Timothy must have been really solid as Kostenberger describes his involvement with Paul:

Recommended by his local church, Timothy joined Paul on his second missionary journey and shared in the evangelization of Macedonia and Achaia (Ac 16:2;17:14-15;18:5). He was associated with Paul during much of his extended ministry in Ephesus (Ac 19:22); traveled with him from Ephesus to Macedonia, to Corinth, back to Macedonia, and to Asia Minor (20:1-6); and was with Paul during his first imprisonment (Php 1:1; Col 1:1; Phm 1).

Timothy also served as Paul’s emissary on a least three occasions prior to his current assignment in Ephesus (1 Ti 1:3); to Thessalonica (ca. AD 50), Corinth (AD 53-54), and Philippi (ca. AD 60-62). Paul frequently called him “fellow worker” (Ro 16:21; 1 Co 16:10; Php 2:22; 1 Th 3:2) and involved him in the writing of six of his apostolic missives (1 and 2 Thessalonians, 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon). Hebrews mentions his release from an otherwise unknown imprisonment (Heb 13:23).⁴

It should be noted that Timothy’s mixed heritage was probably of great advantage to the mission as he traveled with Paul throughout the “Hellenistic-Jewish” world proclaiming the gospel of Christ. It is likely that Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy from Macedonia some time around AD 62, after he was released from his first Roman imprisonment. This was some fifteen years after they had met in Lystra (AD 49), and it is likely that Timothy was in his early to mid thirties. Timothy was working in Ephesus and needed help and input in dealing with false teaching occurring in the Ephesian church.⁵ Paul writes to Titus⁶, stationed on Crete, sometime between his first and second letters to Timothy.⁷

Paul’s Second Letter to Timothy

Some things have changed since Timothy received his first letter from Paul. It is three to four years later, and though he is still working with the church in Ephesus, Paul has now been re-arrested by the Roman authorities. After his release from his first incarceration, in which he had been under house arrest⁸, Paul was unwavering in his mission and continued his travels for the sake of the gospel. We are not sure of the exact details of Paul’s final arrest or even where it took place, but we do know that the circumstances of Paul’s second Roman imprisonment were much different from his first. John Stott describes how these new conditions were likely to be:

He was not now enjoying the comparative freedom and comfort of his own hired house, in which Luke takes leave of him at the end of the Acts and from which he seems to have been set free, as expected.

² George W. Knight III, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Pastoral Epistles*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 3.

³ Andreas Kostenberger, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary Vol. 12: Ephesians – Philemon*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 489.

⁴ Kostenberger, 490.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 495.

⁶ For more information on Titus, a great online resource is Dr. Tom Constable’s Bible Study Notes (www.soniclight.com). Dr. Constable is a professor of Bible Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary and provides all of his class notes free of charge.

⁷ Kostenberger, 603.

⁸ For more on Paul’s first Roman imprisonment see *Prison Break: Mission and Contentment under Arrest* by Reid S. Monaghan.

Instead, he was incarcerated in some dismal underground dungeon with a hole in the ceiling for light and air. Perhaps it was the Mamertine prison, as tradition says. But wherever he was, Onesiphorus succeeded in finding him only after painstaking search (2 Tim 1:17). He was certainly in chains (1:16), wearing fetters like a criminal (2:9). He was also suffering acutely from the loneliness, the boredom and the cold of prison life (4:9-13).⁹

Stott continues:

... this time he [Paul] had to endure great hardship, and there was to be no escape. For the Neronian persecution was in full swing (AD 64). And the tradition is likely to be correct that Paul was condemned to death and then beheaded (as a Roman citizen would have been) on the Ostian Way about three miles outside the city. Shortly before he died... Paul sent this second message to Timothy. His execution seemed to him imminent, so that he was writing under its shadow. Although it was an intensely personal communication to his young friend Timothy, it was also – and consciously – his last will and testament to the church.¹⁰

Paul hoped to the very end that he would be released, but he suspected this was not to be the case. With this in mind, he sent one final message to his young friend, entrusting him with the responsibility of moving forward on the mission of God and leading others to do the same. Timothy was an unlikely candidate for this role, for he was “comparatively young”, “prone to illness” (1 Tim 5:23) and “timid by temperment” (2 Tim 1:7).¹¹ Paul, however, was not calling Timothy to shoulder this weight with his own power, but through the strength of almighty God.

Where We are Walking

Woven throughout Paul’s last message to Timothy is the theme of endurance. This is not to say that we are called to just hold on for dear life as the big bad world just beats us down. No, like the endurance athlete, the hard-working farmer and the dedicated soldier we will suffer hardships, not just due to circumstances which are out of our control, but because of our personal desire to move forward in the mission set before us. Our’s is the mission of God. And as we walk on in God’s mission, Paul’s charge Timothy and us is to have endurance in four primary ways related to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- Chapter 1 - The charge to guard the gospel – If the sacred message of the cross is lost, then all is lost.
- Chapter 2 – The charge to suffer for the gospel – For the joys set before us, this is the way of the Cross.
- Chapter 3 – The charge to continue in the gospel – We must not turn or quit, but continue in the message and way of the Cross.
- Chapter 4 – The charge to proclaim the gospel – Our mission is ultimately the message of the Cross.¹²

We are intentionally involving ourselves in this walk, which we know comes at a cost, but we also know that the accompanying joys far out-measure any price. And in reality, Jesus paid the price, so that our walking is not done in our strength alone, but in the grace he provides. So Walk On with us this spring at Inversion... for there is so much that we cannot leave behind.

Your Brother in Christ,

Jonathan Phipps

⁹ John R.W. Stott, *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of 2 Timothy*, (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 16.

¹⁰ Stott, 18.

¹¹ Ibid., 20.

¹² Ibid., 21.