



2 *Timothy*  
& *Titus*



R E F O R M E D

E X P O S I T O R Y

C O M M E N T A R Y

DANIEL M. DORIANI  
RICHARD D. PHILLIPS

“Unobtrusive scholarship and pastoral passion are the earmarks of this volume in the Reformed Expository Commentary. It is fitting that the exposition of two of the Pastoral Epistles is by two experienced pastors. It is evident that both Doriani and Phillips are writing from experience and not just theory. The textual comments are clear and on point. The theology is edifying. The applications and illustrations are warm, pointed, and personal. Pastors, particularly, will find the volume valuable both for their own personal benefit and encouragement and for insight in how to preach the Pastoral Epistles effectively to their flocks.”

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—**Dennis E. Johnson**, Professor Emeritus of Practical Theology,  
Westminster Seminary California

“In light of my absolute love for the Pastoral Epistles in general and 2 Timothy and Titus in particular, I was thrilled to hear that Dan Doriani and Rick Phillips have provided us with a commentary. Now, having reviewed it, I am astounded at its insights, clarity, and readability. Simply put, this volume is an invaluable research tool and, at the same time, a page-turner. Enjoy!”

—**Harry Reeder**, Senior Pastor, Briarwood Presbyterian Church,  
Birmingham, Alabama

“Some Bible commentaries major in scholarship and minor in application; others major in application and minor in scholarship. This volume does neither. Instead, as the work of two experienced and esteemed pastor-scholars, *2 Timothy & Titus* provides sound and in-depth treatment of the biblical text on the one hand, and a pathway to living out the text on the other. Whether for sermon preparation, group discussion, personal Bible study, or all three, Dan and Rick have done a remarkable job of providing a resource to help believers watch our lives and doctrine closely, that we might please the Lord and love our neighbors well.”

—**Scott Sauls**, Pastor, Christ Presbyterian Church, Nashville; author, *Jesus Outside the Lines* and *A Gentle Answer*

“What a feast of good things the respective congregations of Doriani and Phillips listen to each week! These sermons on two of the Pastoral Epistles are superb examples of *lectio continua* expository preaching that informs the mind and ignites the affections. These two epistles cover some sensitive territory—pastoral correction, womanhood, purity, eldership, essence of manliness, to name just a few. These issues are handled with grace and fortitude. As seasoned preachers, Doriani and Phillips deftly manage to convince, correct, and challenge us all at once. Marvelously done.”

—**Derek W. H. Thomas**, Senior Minister, First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, South Carolina; Teaching Fellow, Ligonier Ministries; Chancellor’s Professor, Reformed Theological Seminary

*2 Timothy & Titus*

REFORMED EXPOSITORY COMMENTARY

*A Series*

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Richard D. Phillips  
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# *2 Timothy & Titus*

DANIEL M. DORIANI &  
RICHARD D. PHILLIPS

**R&R**  
P U B L I S H I N G  
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We dedicate this book to the  
trustees of  
Covenant Theological Seminary and  
Westminster Theological Seminary,  
with thanks for their faithfulness in fulfilling the call of  
Paul's Pastoral Epistles for training ministers of the gospel,  
who know that their first task is to oversee the training  
of pastors and ministry leaders and that  
their second is to encourage and  
support work that serves the wider church.  
Their faithfulness makes work such as this possible.



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## SERIES INTRODUCTION

In every generation there is a fresh need for the faithful exposition of God's Word in the church. At the same time, the church must constantly do the work of theology: reflecting on the teaching of Scripture, confessing its doctrines of the Christian faith, and applying them to contemporary culture. We believe that these two tasks—the expositional and the theological—are interdependent. Our doctrine must derive from the biblical text, and our understanding of any particular passage of Scripture must arise from the doctrine taught in Scripture as a whole.

We further believe that these interdependent tasks of biblical exposition and theological reflection are best undertaken in the church, and most specifically in the pulpits of the church. This is all the more true since the study of Scripture properly results in doxology and praxis—that is, in praise to God and practical application in the lives of believers. In pursuit of these ends, we are pleased to present the Reformed Expository Commentary as a fresh exposition of Scripture for our generation in the church. We hope and pray that pastors, teachers, Bible study leaders, and many others will find this series to be a faithful, inspiring, and useful resource for the study of God's infallible, inerrant Word.

The Reformed Expository Commentary has four fundamental commitments. First, these commentaries aim to be *biblical*, presenting a comprehensive exposition characterized by careful attention to the details of the text. They are not exegetical commentaries—commenting word by word or even verse by verse—but integrated expositions of whole passages of Scripture. Each commentary will thus present a sequential, systematic treatment of an entire book of the Bible, passage by passage. Second, these commentaries are unashamedly *doctrinal*. We are committed to the Westminster

## *Series Introduction*

Confession of Faith and Catechisms as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Each volume will teach, promote, and defend the doctrines of the Reformed faith as they are found in the Bible. Third, these commentaries are *redemptive-historical* in their orientation. We believe in the unity of the Bible and its central message of salvation in Christ. We are thus committed to a Christ-centered view of the Old Testament, in which its characters, events, regulations, and institutions are properly understood as pointing us to Christ and his gospel, as well as giving us examples to follow in living by faith. Fourth, these commentaries are *practical*, applying the text of Scripture to contemporary challenges of life—both public and private—with appropriate illustrations.

The contributors to the Reformed Expository Commentary are all pastors-scholars. As pastor, each author will first present his expositions in the pulpit ministry of his church. This means that these commentaries are rooted in the teaching of Scripture to real people in the church. While aiming to be scholarly, these expositions are not academic. Our intent is to be faithful, clear, and helpful to Christians who possess various levels of biblical and theological training—as should be true in any effective pulpit ministry. Inevitably this means that some issues of academic interest will not be covered. Nevertheless, we aim to achieve a responsible level of scholarship, seeking to promote and model this for pastors and other teachers in the church. Significant exegetical and theological difficulties, along with such historical and cultural background as is relevant to the text, will be treated with care.

We strive for a high standard of enduring excellence. This begins with the selection of the authors, all of whom have proved to be outstanding communicators of God's Word. But this pursuit of excellence is also reflected in a disciplined editorial process. Each volume is edited by both a series editor and a testament editor. The testament editors, Iain Duguid for the Old Testament and Daniel Doriani for the New Testament, are accomplished pastors and respected scholars who have taught at the seminary level. Their job is to ensure that each volume is sufficiently conversant with up-to-date scholarship and is faithful and accurate in its exposition of the text. As series editors, we oversee each volume to ensure its overall quality—including excellence of writing, soundness of teaching, and usefulness in application. Working together as an editorial team, along with the publisher, we are devoted to ensuring that these are the best commentaries that our gifted authors can

provide, so that the church will be served with trustworthy and exemplary expositions of God's Word.

It is our goal and prayer that the Reformed Expository Commentary will serve the church by renewing confidence in the clarity and power of Scripture and by upholding the great doctrinal heritage of the Reformed faith. We hope that pastors who read these commentaries will be encouraged in their own expository preaching ministry, which we believe to be the best and most biblical pattern for teaching God's Word in the church. We hope that lay teachers will find these commentaries among the most useful resources they rely on for understanding and presenting the text of the Bible. And we hope that the devotional quality of these studies of Scripture will instruct and inspire each Christian who reads them in joyful, obedient discipleship to Jesus Christ.

May the Lord bless all who read the Reformed Expository Commentary. We commit these volumes to the Lord Jesus Christ, praying that the Holy Spirit will use them for the instruction and edification of the church, with thanksgiving to God the Father for his unceasing faithfulness in building his church through the ministry of his Word.

Richard D. Phillips  
Philip Graham Ryken  
Series Editors



## PREFACE TO 2 TIMOTHY

Each book in the Reformed Expository Commentary series is designed to assist pastors as they preach and teach Scripture, but 2 Timothy is for pastors twice over, for Paul writes as apostle and pastor to Timothy, his primary successor, as he faces the end of his ministry—indeed, the end of life itself. The epistle therefore contains Paul’s reflections on his ministry as it ends and his instruction to Timothy as his ministry begins in earnest. His convictions pour out in all directions:

- “Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord nor of me his prisoner” (2 Tim. 1:8).
- “You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2:1).
- “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2:3).
- “Remember Jesus Christ . . . . If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself” (2:8, 13).
- “Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies” (2:23).
- “The Lord’s servant must . . . be . . . able to teach, . . . correcting his opponents with gentleness” (2:24–25).
- “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (3:16–17).
- “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season” (4:2).

Second Timothy has a bracing urgency, a lack of pretense, born of the situation. Paul expects to die soon, and Timothy, an imperfect man, must

*Preface to 2 Timothy*

take up the reins of leadership, whether he is ready or no. He has one last chance to see his spiritual son—“Do your best to come to me soon” (2 Tim. 4:9). He has one last chance to look his friend in the eye, one last chance to address a man upon whose shoulders a great part of the church will rest. And we get to listen.

Second Timothy is a short epistle and little studied. I hope to change that, slightly, by offering it to you, my readers, and by urging you to share it with each other and the church. The book’s brevity (eighty-three verses) and relative simplicity (compared, for example, to Romans) allow the commentator the luxury of addressing matters that might have to be skipped in other circumstances. The amazing vice list in chapter 3 comes to mind. More than that, however, I offer Paul’s testimony as his coda, and perhaps yours and mine: “The time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:6–7). May you and I say the same, one day, as God strengthens us by his grace.

I owe especial debts to several people: To Vicki Tatko, for tracking down recalcitrant sources, to Rick Phillips and Iain Duguid, for an array of beneficial editorial suggestions, and to the listeners who heard this material at one stage or another—the congregants at the Kirk of the Hills, the students in MDiv and DMin classes at Covenant Seminary, and groups of pastors now and again. Deepest thanks go to my beloved wife and partner, Debbie, who helps edit a chapter on occasion and who edits and facilitates my life every day. It’s not rhetoric to say that without her, this project would be a vague notion, not a completed book.

Daniel M. Doriani

## PREFACE TO TITUS

The influence of the apostle Paul on evangelical churches cannot be doubted. Ever since Martin Luther, the books of Romans and Galatians have formed the spine of the Protestant gospel. It is a curious inconsistency, then, that the same cannot be said for the influence of Paul's Pastoral Letters on the evangelical doctrine of the church. It is not as simple to draw a complete ecclesiology from the letters to Timothy and Titus as it is to deduce justification from Paul's more famous letters. Nonetheless, the Pastoral Epistles drive stakes in the ground that outline a vital foundation for apostolic church structure and practice. From this perspective, we can appreciate the great importance of Paul's Spirit-inspired letters to Timothy and Titus. From his clear teaching on the qualifications and functions of elders and deacons to the crucial role of clear doctrinal standards, Paul's instructions to his pastoral colleagues are of enormous value to church leaders today.

Beyond its contribution to a sound ecclesiology, Paul's epistle to Titus deserves to be deeply loved by God's people for its display of manifold colors of grace and love amid the struggles of ministry. It is also a tough and realistic instruction that faces head-on the dangers of false teaching, cultural accommodation, and human sin. Paul believed that Christian leaders must employ sound spiritual authority in protecting the flock, relying above all on the sheer power of biblical truth. Finally, the warmth and shared commitment enjoyed by Paul and his associates inspire the servants of Christ today to a comradeship in gospel ministry that is sorely lacking but will both strengthen and sweeten our vital labors in the cause of the gospel.

It is a privilege to publish these chapters on Titus together with my colleague and friend Dan Doriani. Perhaps a bit like the Pauline fraternity revealed in the Pastoral Epistles, our fellowship as an editorial team in this

*Preface to Titus*

commentary series, together with Philip Ryken and Iain Duguid, has contributed greatly to the blessing of our labors. I am grateful to the faithful congregation of Second Presbyterian Church of Greenville, South Carolina, to whom these messages were first preached in the evening worship services. As always, I thank my dear wife for her stalwart support of my ministry and partnership in the gospel. Above all, I offer these studies on Titus to Jesus Christ our Savior, who delivered us from sin “not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy” (Titus 3:5). To him be glory. Amen.

Richard D. Phillips



*2 Timothy*

**RUNNING THE RACE**



# 1

## THANKSGIVING IN DISTRESS

### *2 Timothy 1:1–7*

*I thank God whom I serve . . . as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. (2 Tim. 1:3–4)*



Imagine, if you will, that you have a hundred days to live. For forty years, you have led a life that has been vital and demanding. Throughout, you forged lifelong friendships and roused bitter opposition. You endured threats, beatings, and unjust imprisonment, yet you also gained unparalleled love and loyalty. Hundreds, even thousands, have rallied to your cause, but a few betrayed you. The work stretched you, strengthened you, and almost crushed you. As the last day draws nigh, you plan your final words for beloved partners and successors. You hope to inspire them to recommit to your shared vision, to galvanize them for it, and to shore up their weaknesses, if possible.

I describe, obviously, the last days of the apostle Paul. As Paul faces death at Roman hands, he prepares to transfer his leadership role to Timothy first, and then to the next generation of Christian leaders. The time is so close that his mind blazes with it. Despite his looming death and his concerns for Timothy, Paul's mood is positive. Despite his concerns, he is thankful,

## *Thanksgiving in Distress*

even joyful, as he hopes Timothy has the grace, power, love, and self-control that foster faithful endurance (2 Tim. 1:2–4, 7). At the close of the letter, Paul testifies:

The time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness. (2 Tim. 4:6–8)

Second Timothy differs from Paul's other epistles in that the moment impels him to pen final instructions to his trusted lieutenant. The letter is deeply personal, too, for Paul loved Timothy like a son, a "beloved child" (2 Tim. 1:2). Meanwhile, Paul languishes in chains (1:12; 2:9). Former friends and allies have abandoned him, perhaps because they are ashamed to associate with a condemned prisoner (1:15–16; 4:10). Finally, foes trouble the church by quarreling and rejecting sound teaching (2:14–18; 4:3).

Paul expects to die (2 Tim. 4:6–8). Yet, believing that limited time remains, he calls Timothy to his side (v. 9). He also asks, so personally, that Timothy bring Mark, as well as Paul's cloak and a part of his library, for tasks that remain (vv. 9–12).

Despite dire circumstances, Paul stands unshaken. He knows that Jesus, the Savior, has conquered death and that no one can thwart the spread of the gospel (2 Tim. 1:10; 2:9). These truths should also bolster Timothy to press on and to train leaders for the next generation (2:1–2; 3:10–15; 4:1–2).

None of Paul's letters is dated, but orthodox scholars conclude that Paul wrote 2 Timothy several years after the close of Acts, in A.D. 66 or 67.<sup>1</sup> In Acts 28:14–31, Paul had freedom of association, liberty to teach, and a conviction that Rome knew he had committed no great crime. The Empire's last statement posited Paul's innocence: "This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment" (Acts 26:31).

This is not Paul's first imprisonment, but he previously expected release (Phil. 1:25–26; 2:24). Not so here. The earliest accounts agree that Paul was released from the imprisonment of Acts 28. Clement of Rome, writing around A.D. 95, when many Romans who had known Paul were still alive, records that the apostle traveled to "the farthest bounds of the West"—most

1. Certain critical scholars defend an early date and Pauline authorship of 2 Timothy. See Luke Timothy Johnson, *Letters to Paul's Delegates: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 1–33.

likely Spain (1 Clement 5:6). After that, Paul was arrested again, perhaps in Troas, so that his cloak and books remained there (2 Tim. 4:13). Eusebius, the chief early-church historian, said that Paul successfully pleaded his innocence during his first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28). Then, after his release, Paul was “sent again upon the ministry of preaching, and after a second visit to the city [Rome] . . . he finished his life with martyrdom” at the hand of Nero.<sup>2</sup>

Second Timothy opens and closes with personal words to Timothy; the body has two principal themes: the need to remain faithful in suffering and the need to deal effectively with false teachers. This commentary adopts an outline that resembles many others:

1. 1:1–5. Paul greets Timothy and gives thanks for his faith and ministry.
2. 1:6–2:13. Paul urges Timothy to remain faithful in gospel ministry despite suffering.
  - A. 1:6–7. Paul commends fearlessness and strength.
  - B. 1:8–14. Although ministry brings suffering, the gospel elicits faith and loyal service.
  - C. 1:15–18. Paul describes cases of disloyalty and loyalty among his collaborators.
  - D. 2:1–7. Paul illustrates loyalty through the work of farmers, soldiers, and athletes.
  - E. 2:8–13. Paul grounds the appeal to loyalty in Jesus’ work and character.
3. 2:14–3:17. Paul urges Timothy to resist false teachers, using the God-appointed means.
  - A. 2:14–21. Good teachers refuse petty quarrels but defend the truth when false teachers assail it.
  - B. 2:22–26. Timothy must pursue godliness while gently correcting his opponents.
  - C. 3:1–9. Hard days will come, when evil leaders lead many astray and oppose the truth.

2. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. C. F. Cruse (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 2.22 (58–59).

## *Thanksgiving in Distress*

- D. 3:10–17. Timothy has resources in the battle: Paul’s example, his family, and God’s Word.
- 4. 4:1–22. Paul presents closing charges to Timothy.
  - A. 4:1–5. Timothy must preach the Word.
  - B. 4:6–8. Paul testifies to his faithfulness and hope.
  - C. 4:9–13. Paul summons Timothy to his side.
  - D. 4:14–18. The Lord stands by Paul, even if men abandon him.
  - E. 4:19–22. Paul sends final greetings.

### **PAUL GREETES HIS BELOVED SPIRITUAL CHILD (2 TIM. 1:1–2)**

Paul calls himself “an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:1). Paul identifies himself as Christ’s apostle in most of his letters, especially when his authority is doubted (2 Corinthians; Galatians). But he also claims apostleship in personal letters, probably because his churches read his letters aloud. As he rebukes error and charts the path ahead, it will help the church to remember that an *apostle* appointed Timothy to lead.

Paul opened five epistles by asserting that he is an apostle “by the will of God.” The expression fits here, since Paul is exercising authority over Timothy and the church. It also reflects Paul’s conviction that he conducted his life under God’s direction in all circumstances (Acts 9:16). “By the will of God” implies that God actively chooses and directs church leaders.

Paul addresses his letter to “Timothy, my beloved child” (2 Tim. 1:2a). Timothy was nearly forty when Paul wrote 1 Timothy and older still in 2 Timothy. Timothy is Paul’s child because he is the “legitimate heir” of Paul’s theology and authority.<sup>3</sup> And Paul loves Timothy, his closest disciple and successor. Scholars say that Timothy and Titus are “apostolic delegates,” since they supervised Paul’s churches in his absence. Timothy led in Ephesus (1 Tim. 3:14–15), and Titus brought order to Crete (Titus 1:5–9). But Timothy is both delegate and beloved son. Scholars occasionally name 2 Timothy Paul’s “last will and testament.” But the letter is more personal than that. Paul longs to see Timothy, his “beloved child” (2 Tim. 1:2–5).

Paul had reason to love Timothy. Paul lists him as a coauthor of five

3. Risto Saarinen, *The Pastoral Epistles with Philemon & Jude*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008), 120.

epistles (2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1). Timothy also represented Paul in Macedonia (Acts 18:5; 19:22), Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17), Philippi (Phil. 2:19), and Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3). Timothy's teaching and lifestyle reminded churches of Paul's ministry (1 Cor. 4:16). Indeed, his selflessness reminded people of Jesus himself. Paul said, "I have no one like him" (Phil. 2:19-21). No wonder he summoned Timothy to his side (2 Tim. 4:9).

Facing death, Paul calls himself apostle of the "promise of . . . life" in 2 Timothy 1:1. Death is a terrible foe, and unjust execution is especially pernicious. But for Paul, the "promise of . . . life" resolves the problem of death, for Jesus "abolished death" and brought life "through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10). For that gospel, God appointed Paul as an apostle (v. 11). Therefore, Paul can heed his own counsel in 1 Thessalonians 4:13—he does not grieve his own death, "as others do who have no hope."

Paul applied the gospel to himself, and we should do the same. The gospel solves the problem of death and many others. Indeed, careful meditation shows that the gospel remedies a great array of spiritual problems:

- If we face conflict with family or neighbors, we remember that "the gospel of peace" (Eph. 6:15) grants peace with God and the hope of peace with man.
- If guilt burdens us, we trust "the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24), since justification and propitiation remove the guilt of sin (Rom. 3:24-25).
- If enslaved to sin, we remember the message of redemption (Eph. 1:7).
- If we feel unloved, the gospel offers adoption into God's family (Rom. 8:15, 23).
- If we are estranged from God, the gospel offers reconciliation with him. It can also foster reconciliation in human relationships (2 Cor. 5:18; Rom. 12:18).

We may extend this principle widely. When pastors visit people who suffer from accidents or illness, they should speak of "the gospel of the kingdom" (Matt. 4:23; 24:14), for it assures us that God reigns, come what may. If falsely accused, we remember that God has silenced the accuser "by the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 12:10-11). When we face false allegations, we should think, "I may face one false charge, but I am erroneously unindicted for ten others, and the gospel covers them all." If we are estranged from

## *Thanksgiving in Distress*

family, we remember that the gospel gives us new brothers, sisters, and parents (Matt. 12:46–50).

We should constantly explore the ways in which the gospel answers the issues of life. A worshiper accidentally reminded me of this one Sunday in mid-December. A worship leader announced the hymn “Joy to the World,” and a woman nearby groaned, “Oh, no, not ‘Joy to the World’ again. I’m so tired of ‘Joy to the World.’” She *meant* “Let’s have a *new* Christmas song.” The desire is legitimate. Psalm 96 begins: “Oh sing to the LORD a new song.” But if we take her words literally, we realize that the gospel can become too familiar and we can grow weary of the joy that the message brings. We will please God and serve ourselves if we keep exploring the riches of the gospel.<sup>4</sup>

### **PAUL OFFERS GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE (2 TIM. 1:2)**

Paul offers Timothy “grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord” (2 Tim. 1:2). Paul’s greetings typically begin with “grace” and “peace.” Today, letters begin “Dear Jessica” or “Dear Jason,” but Greco-Roman letters began with “Greetings”—*chairein*. Paul shifted to “grace”—*charis*. Grace, the source of salvation, empowers disciples to live out the faith.

Paul adds the traditional Hebrew blessing of “peace.” Notice that Paul offers peace from prison, where he could be quite upset. In Scripture, peace represents God’s comprehensive blessing. Our experience of peace is uneven. Parents hardly feel peaceful when a teething baby cries all night, nor do workers feel peaceful when they serve tyrants or incompetents. Our goal is to *appropriate* the peace that Jesus offers. Paul displayed impressive peace in prison, but he felt the agony of betrayal, too: “Demas . . . has deserted me . . . Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm” (2 Tim. 4:10–16). Peace may increase, but the line of progress is jagged, not smooth.

Paul also mentions “mercy.” God’s people often plead for his mercy (Gen. 43:14; Ps. 51:1). In the Gospels, Jesus’ mercy moved him to heal the sick (Matt. 9:13; 12:7; 15:22; 20:30). For Paul, God’s mercy brings salvation to sinners (Rom. 9:15). Peace and mercy are divine gifts that become elements of a disciple’s life. We then offer them to others, as Paul does here. Jesus said,

4. Dan Doriani, “The Gospel & Joy to the World,” Faith at Work, Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, December 12, 2018.

“Blessed are the merciful . . . Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matt. 5:7-9). If we *taste* God’s mercy, we should also long to *show* mercy.

## PAUL THANKS GOD FOR TIMOTHY (2 TIM. 1:3-5)

### *Paul Prays for Timothy (2 Tim. 1:3)*

After extending greetings and prayers, Paul introduces his themes. As Paul passes his leadership *to* Timothy, he gives thanks *for* Timothy. Notice that Paul’s prayer starts with thanksgiving: “I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers” (2 Tim. 1:3). When Paul says that he joins “my ancestors,” he alludes to God’s covenants. That establishes continuity between Paul’s ministry and the faith of Israel.<sup>5</sup> Israel could be rebellious and vain, but Paul knows that many of the people waited eagerly for Jesus. He also mentions his prayers, and we can imagine the assurance that Timothy enjoyed, knowing that Paul prayed for him. May we join Paul in similar prayer for our friends.

Paul also states that he has a “clear conscience” in 2 Timothy 1:3. This makes sense because imprisonment is typically a sign of guilt; Paul knows that he is innocent, and it is proper for him to say so (Acts 23:1; 24:16). Like Paul, pastors seem to attract false accusations. When falsely charged, we should state our innocence to protect our reputation and that of the church. Of course, the claim of a clear conscience can be baseless, since the conscience, like every other human faculty, can be flawed. The conscience is “seared,” that is, rendered insensitive, when someone repeatedly commits the same sins and excuses them (1 Tim. 4:2). But that hardly describes Paul. He had a genuinely or appropriately clear conscience. On the other hand, unbelief defiles the conscience so that “nothing is pure” (Titus 1:15). We observe this in people who see ulterior motives everywhere, people who doubt that anyone does anything altruistically.

In Paul’s day, the Roman gods provided no moral order and the conscience lost its bearings. Our day is worse. Atheists may judge an act “offensive,” “unacceptable,” or “harmful,” but if there is no God, nothing is objectively *wrong*. Cultural Marxists argue that ethical standards simply encode practices that benefit the powerful. On this account, anyone who

5. “As did my ancestors” translates the terse phrase *apo progenōn*—“from ancestors.” Most modern translations are similar to the ESV.

lives by the rules is a dupe. This makes the conscience all but worthless. But Paul teaches that the conscience is a God-given faculty that helps us appraise ourselves (Rom. 2:14–15). It helps us make correct judgments, so that we neither condemn the innocent nor excuse the guilty. We should develop the conscience because it is an important, God-given faculty. Again, like every other faculty, the conscience is fallen and fallible. We can ignore, silence, or distort it. We can dull it by practicing sin. If the conscience works poorly, the fault is ours. How blessed it is to maintain a clear conscience, a moral compass that helps us assess our actions as right or wrong.

***Paul Longs for Timothy (2 Tim. 1:4)***

Paul and Timothy loved each other. “As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy” (2 Tim. 1:4). Timothy’s tears probably fell when they last parted, and now Paul longs to see Timothy. “I long” translates *epipotheō*, a term for strong positive feelings (Rom. 1:11; Phil. 1:8). Paul anticipates a joyful reunion with Timothy and expected him to be “filled with joy.” The Gospels show that Jesus had especially dear friends, too—Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and one of the Twelve (John 11:5, 36; 13:23). Indeed, both Jesus and Paul felt the full range of human emotions.

The Bible often mentions the emotional life. Today, strong displays of feelings lead people to say, “Don’t be so emotional.” But God teaches us to direct our emotions well, not to quash them. God commands believers to rejoice and to love. And while he does command “Fear not,” he enjoins fear in other places (2 Kings 17:35–39; Prov. 3:7; Heb. 4:1). Robert Roberts remarks that the person who is “too emotional” has a problem not because he *has* emotions, “but because he has such poor ones, or such a limited repertoire. The concerns his emotions go back to are momentary, primitive, immature, badly ordered.” The problem is not that the emotional person “feels strongly,” but that “he feels strongly about the wrong things.”<sup>6</sup> Too often, we are excited about trivia, such as the latest controversy in politics or sports. It is better to express strong feelings about the great matters. And let us order our emotions well, in private and in public, and so shepherd our emotional life together.

6. Robert C. Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions: A Psychology of Christian Virtues* (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 2007), 16.

### *Paul Remembers Timothy's Faith (2 Tim. 1:5)*

As Paul prays for Timothy, he is “mindful” (NASB; the Greek verb is active) of Timothy’s “sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well” (2 Tim. 1:5). Although Timothy’s father was a Gentile (Acts 16:1), real faith indwelt his relatives. Paul knows that Timothy has sincere faith, too.<sup>7</sup> What a blessing to see beloved family members walk with God. What a bulwark against doubt and confusion. May all who have godly families give thanks for their example, and may godly parents aspire to set an example of sincere faith for their children and grandchildren.

### **PAUL EXHORTS TIMOTHY TO EXERCISE HIS GIFT (2 TIM. 1:6-7)**

After giving thanks for Timothy’s faith, Paul urges him to manifest it: “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2 Tim. 1:6). It seems that Timothy’s personality was less than forceful. Paul knew that churches could be prone to despise him (1 Cor. 16:10-11; 1 Tim. 4:12). The command to fan his gift into flame does not necessarily mean that Timothy’s gift was dormant, but his gift did require him to teach, preach, correct, persuade, and lead. These are daunting tasks. Therefore, Timothy, like all other church leaders, needed constant renewal. God’s gifts are gracious, yet we “must be continuously alert to revitalize [them].”<sup>8</sup>

The accent falls on God’s gift more than on Timothy’s task. God called Timothy and gave him the capacity to lead after Paul’s departure. But he needs proper zeal so that he can fully exercise “the gift of God” (2 Tim. 1:6). This “gift of God” is Paul’s capacity for ministry. Elsewhere, Paul calls these gifts “service” (1 Cor. 12:5-6; the Greek is plural: *diakoniōn*) and “manifestation[s] of the Spirit” (12:7), but his favorite term is *charismata* “gifts” (plural; Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:4, 28-31). God’s gifts are more than abilities. They are God-given capacities to bestow grace and empower believers (1 Cor. 12:7-11; 14:12).

Paul declares that “the gift of God . . . is in you through the laying on of

7. “I am sure” translates a perfect passive participle of *peithō*, normally rendered “convince” or “persuade.”

8. J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries (London: A & C Black, 1963), 159.

## *Thanksgiving in Distress*

my hands” (2 Tim. 1:6b). This might mean that God bestowed a special gift when the “elders laid their hands” on Timothy (1 Tim. 4:14). More often, however, the laying on of hands functions as a sign or confirmation of God’s already-bestowed gifts that the recipient has been exercising. There is nothing magical in a touch. Jesus often healed *with* a touch, but he did not heal *by* a touch (Matt. 8:5–10). Similarly, when church leaders lay on hands to commission people (Acts 13:2; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22), it should be a sign that the church *recognizes* a leader, not that it *creates* a leader. Today, we ordain pastors to confirm that they are gifted and well prepared for ministry. Of course, the Lord can add gifts at ordination or at any other time.<sup>9</sup>

So Timothy has the faith and gifts necessary for ministry. But did he have the right disposition? Paul lists the character traits that ministers need: “God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (2 Tim. 1:7). Notice these four traits: fearlessness, power, love, and self-control.

Paul was fearless indeed. When a riot broke out in Ephesus over the spread of Christianity, he wanted to address the enraged mob (Acts 19:29–31). Like Timothy, all pastors need energy and confidence. That holds for the timid and the reticent, too, for God does not give “a spirit . . . of fear” (2 Tim. 1:7).

We need to be honest here. Fear *does* strike church leaders. Preachers worry about the reaction to unpopular messages and decisions. Elders dread the prospect of church discipline. Anyone can fear a decline in attendance or giving. Paul admits that he was weak and fearful when he arrived in Corinth (1 Cor. 2:3). But he pressed on nonetheless, and Timothy and contemporary pastors should do the same.

Instead of fear, Paul recommends a spirit “of power.” Since the gospel is “the power of God for salvation” (Rom. 1:16) and Jesus is “the power of God,” leaders should be strong. But again, Christian leaders are so obviously weak that there is no need to list our problems. Paul himself was strong in many ways—he had the power to teach all night if necessary (Acts 20:7–12)—but he had weaknesses, too. For example, the Corinthians noted that “his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account” (2 Cor. 10:10).

There are several essential lessons here. First and most obviously, Paul didn’t always meet his own requirements for Timothy and later ministers. No one does.

9. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 190.

Second, Paul did have more strength and less fear than most. After all, Paul did try to evangelize a judge at one of his trials (Acts 26:12–29). Nonetheless, Paul somehow had a successor who was more fearful than fearless, nor was he especially strong, by natural disposition.

Third, we need to distinguish personality from character. Perhaps Timothy was weak, stylistically. Perhaps he was retiring, personally. No matter; there are other ways to be strong. That is, Paul’s *personality* is not the standard for gospel ministry.<sup>10</sup> People need zeal for the work (Rom. 12:8) and endurance, but one need not be overtly or socially strong to pass such tests.

Since Chrysostom, commentators see the contest between fear and power as a theme in 2 Timothy.<sup>11</sup> Above all, “the power of God” can make Timothy strong (2 Tim. 1:7–8). Living in fear appeals to some people. At a minimum, cowards take fewer risks. They ask less of themselves. But disciples have God-given power.

Second Timothy 1:7 also mentions “love” and “self-control.” Because God poured his love into our hearts (Rom. 5:5), pastors can love their people. “Self-control” (*sōphronismos*) signifies the self-discipline born of sober thought and a refusal to indulge sin. Timothy needs self-control to keep working in the face of opposition, to keep studying Scripture when weary, and to keep speaking when few listen.

The virtue of self-control aligns with 1 Timothy 4:12: “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example.” If churches must never “despise” their pastors, pastors should make it easy for churches to respect them. In 1 Timothy 4:12–15, Paul notes that Timothy gains respect through godly character and progress in ministry. In 2 Timothy 1, Paul tells Timothy to fan God’s gift through a character of strength, love, and self-control.

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

We must learn from Paul’s demeanor during unjust imprisonment. His confidence in God grants him peace. It grants us peace, too. We also notice that imprisonment does not stop Paul. He keeps functioning as a leader by writing. How blessed are we if we do what we can, whatever our condition.

10. When Paul let his friends restrain his impulse to speak in Acts 19, he admitted as much.

11. Jay Twomey, *The Pastoral Epistles through the Centuries* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 120.

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Paul tells Timothy to fan his gift to a flame, and every disciple should do the same. This happens when we exercise the power, love, and self-control that Paul recommends, but we also need to know what our gifts are. How can we know? First, we pay attention to our desires and interests for service. What do we want to do? We must test our desires, but they may be God-given. Second, we should volunteer to serve in an area of interest. See whether discerning people invite you to join them. If they do, you may have found a gift that you can fan into flame. Third, seek training, mentors, and experience, to hone growing skills. Fourth, look for signs that your work is fruitful, in the opinion of wise people.

Above all, let us hold fast to the gospel, as Paul did. The promise of eternal life kept Paul sane and strong, even thankful, as he faced an unjust death. The gospel gives eternal life, starting now. Paul has that life, and the power of that life is visible throughout his final letter to Timothy. What a comfort to know that Jesus holds us fast in life and death.