

Mount Pisgah A.M.E. Church

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Survey of the Bible

Lesson 57: 2 Timothy

The Book of 2 Timothy

The book of 2 Timothy is the third of three New Testament books known as the Pastoral Epistles (the others being 1 Timothy and Titus). They are grouped together because unlike the other Epistles which are written to groups of people, they are addressed to individuals, specifically those who lead congregations. While 1 Timothy is a “leadership manual” addressed to a young pastor who is establishing a church, 2 Timothy is more of a “combat manual” with instructions for a soldier of the Lord. It is a charge from a departing mentor to a protégé about what to hold onto and protect, and what to look out for amid mounting persecution.

Author

Tradition holds that Paul wrote 2 Timothy for some of the same reasons that it is believed that he wrote 1 Timothy. In spite of the arguments against Paul’s authorship (Greek used in the letter, topics seemingly too advanced for his time), the same supports for Paul’s authorship apply to 2 Timothy as apply to 1 Timothy. Paul was establishing something new through his ordained sons in ministry Timothy and Titus – an institutional church that would teach pure doctrine, survive heresies and persecution, and continue to stand until the promised return of Christ.

The Times and context of 2 Timothy

Timothy was a young man of mixed heritage (Greek father, Jewish mother) whose mother had nurtured him in the Hebrew Scriptures from his childhood in Lystra. Evidently his grandmother and mother had been converted to Christ, and then during Paul’s second missionary journey, Timothy also had a radical conversion experience (2 Timothy 1:4). When Paul returned to Lystra during his third journey, he “adopted” Timothy, ordained him, and took him with him as a son in ministry (Acts 16:1-3). Timothy traveled with Paul throughout his journeys, and evidently was even in Rome during Paul’s first imprisonment there.

As stated in the 1 Timothy outline, Paul was evidently released from his first Roman imprisonment (which was more like “house arrest”) after the conclusion of Acts 28. He then began his fourth missionary journey which took him first to Ephesus. He left his young protégé in Ephesus to supervise the work and traveled to Macedonia (from which he wrote 1 Timothy), Crete, Corinth, and even spent two years in Spain (64 AD to 66 AD).

After 64 AD, however, the Roman Emperor Nero became much more antagonistic toward Christians (Christianity was declared *religio illicito* – illegal religion). Paul was re-arrested in Troas (leaving his books and parchments) and brought back to Rome for trial. However, this time, his prison conditions were far worse. He was no longer in “protective custody” or “house arrest,” he was detained (as a threat to the empire) in a cold, dark cell. Because of the persecution, many of his friends had deserted him except for a few loyalists. Paul wrote 2 Timothy, in spite of these conditions, to encourage his young son to stay strong in the faith.

Overview

Paul knows as he writes this final epistle that his days on earth are quickly drawing to a close. About to relinquish his heavy burdens, Paul seeks to challenge and strengthen his somewhat timid but faithful associate, Timothy, in his difficult ministry in Ephesus. In spite of Paul's bleak circumstances, this is a letter of encouragement that urges Timothy on to steadfastness in the fulfillment of his divinely appointed task. Paul calls Timothy "a good soldier of Jesus Christ", and 2 Timothy is a "combat manual" for spiritual warfare. Central to everything in 2 Timothy is the need to use his training in this present period of testing (1 and 2) and to endure through worsening times (3 and 4).

Outline

I. In Trials: Use Your Training (1:1-2:26)

- A. Salutation (1:1-1:2)
- B. Thanksgiving for Timothy's Foundation of Faith (1:3-1:7)
 - 1. Heritage (1:3-1:5)
 - 2. Spiritual Gifting (1:6-1:7)
- C. Paul's Example (1:8-1:12)
- D. Don't Cast Away God's Investment In You (1:13-1:17)
 - 1. Guard The Deposit (1:13-1:14)
 - 2. Don't Desert Like Phygelus and Hermogenes (3:15)
 - 3. Be a Blessing Like Onesiphorus (1:16-1:18)
- E. Training Principles (2:1-2:7)
 - 1. Be Strong and Train Others (2:1-2:2)
 - 2. Like a Good Soldier (2:3-2:4) – resilient, faithful
 - 3. Like a Good Athlete (2:5) – obedient to the Word
 - 4. Like a Good Farmer (2:6-2:7) – live yourself on what you sow to others (integrity)
- F. The Gospel – Worth Fighting For (2:8-2:13)
- G. Contrasting Faithful and Unfaithful Workers (2:14-2:26)
 - 1. True versus False Teachers (2:14-2:19)
 - 2. Noble versus Dishonorable Articles (2:20-2:21)
 - 3. Kind versus Quarrelsome (2:22-2:26)

II. In Testing: Endure and Be Faithful (3:1-4:22)

- A. Approaching Day of Apostasy (3:1-3:17)
 - 1. Love of Money and Pleasure (3:1-3:5)
 - 2. Depraved Living and Thinking (3:6-3:9)
 - 3. Hold On! (3:10-3:17)
 - a) Hold to My Example (3:10-3:11)
 - b) All Christians Will be Persecuted (3:12-3:13)
 - c) Hold On To The Word! (3:14-3:17)
- B. Paul's Final Pleas (4:1-4:22)
 - 1. Preach The True Word (4:1-4:5)
 - 2. I'm On My Way to Reward (4:6-4:8)
 - 3. Paul's Situation (4:9-4:13)
 - 4. Human Opposition and God's Support (4:14-4:18)
 - 5. Closing Greetings (4:19-4:22)

Some Keys to understanding The Book of 2 Timothy

- In 2 Timothy especially, Paul exhorts Timothy to use the Word of God constantly in order to overcome growing obstacles to the spread of the gospel.
- Timothy is getting hit from both sides, persecution from secular authorities outside of the church and dissension and deception within the church. As a spiritual father, Paul urges his young helper to overcome his natural timidity and allow The Spirit to stir up the gifts within him so that he can boldly proclaim the gospel, even if it means that he will suffer for doing so. Thus, 2 Timothy is a testimony to the necessity of The Word and The Spirit being in operation together.
- The “weak willed women” referred to in chapter 3 is not a suggestion that women have weaker wills, but rather another allusion to the notion that in Greco-Roman society, women did not have access to learning opportunities outside of the home. Knowledge and wisdom from God’s Word were seen as the key to strengthening the will, overcoming the flesh, and deliverance from sin. Those who were not allowed access to teaching, especially from God’s Word, were seen as easily vulnerable to the influence of manipulative men who would have their way with them. Thus, Paul is both giving a warning about such men and also emphasizing the importance of being grounded in sound teaching.
- Scripture as “God breathed” (i.e., inspired) is central to the notion that the Holy Scriptures have special power to transform lives. This is what Christians believe separates the Bible from any other book that has been written.
- Paul states that he is awaiting a “crown of righteousness,” that he will be rewarded for *faithfulness*. This is not to suggest that Paul’s works merited his salvation, but rather that *after* he was saved (*only* by grace), that he will receive a reward. Salvation will be the same for all believers; however rewards in heaven will differ according to faithfulness.
- The “Laying on of Hands” is a symbolic way of transferring authority. Paul was able to impart spiritual gifting, and the authority to utilize that gifting, when he laid hands on Timothy. This is what takes places through the laying on of hands at a minister’s ordination.

Some Lessons from 2 Timothy

- Family examples can be critically important in the establishing the faith in children. We ought to always be mindful of what sort of example of faith we are setting in front of our children. They watch us carefully, and, as it is said, Christianity is as much “caught” as it is “taught.”
- Although Timothy evidently grew up in a Christian home, it was his *own* tearful salvation experience that qualified him to do the work of ministry. One cannot rely on family member’s relationships with God, but “God bless the child who has his own!”
- God may have very well poured gifts inside of us, but often they lie dormant until something or someone intentionally fans them into flame. God gives gifts by God’s grace, but it is our responsibility to hone and develop them.
- The Spirit of God is capable of enabling a person to transcend their personality for the purposes of being used by God in ministry. We should not limit ourselves by saying, “I could never do that...it’s not my personality.” Personality is ONE factor, but God is able to help a person overcome any shortcoming to do what God wants done.
- We must understand that in the last days, popular opinion will become increasingly antagonistic toward those who hold to the foundational tenets of the faith. We must make sure that our motives for serving God are faithful obedience to the One who has redeemed us, and not the need for approval. If we want to be faithful, we will *necessarily* be different from the crowd.
- Preparing for the inevitable difficult days ahead requires that we LEARN THE WORD... it is like basic training for a soldier. We can’t get on the battlefield without going through basic and expect to survive. When opposition comes, we must remember to USE THE WORD and not rely only on our own resources. In times like these, WE NEED AN ANCHOR.