

A Study of 1st & 2nd Timothy

2nd Timothy 1:1-8 Not Ashamed...

I am reading from 2nd Timothy chapter one, verses one through seven. If you're using one of the pew Bibles, the passage is located on page 994...2nd Timothy 1:1-7.

This is what God's Word says:

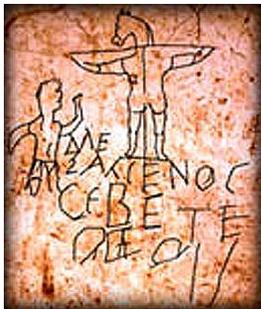
^{ESV} **2 Timothy 1:1**...Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus, ² To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. ³ I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. ⁴ As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. ⁵ I am reminded of your 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. ⁶ 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, ⁷ for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. ⁸ Therefore do not be ashamed...

There is a famous piece of graffiti found on a wall near the Palatine Hill in Rome. This particular piece of graffiti dates back to the first or second century AD and has become so famous it even has its own name. It is known as the "**Alexamenos**

Graffito".¹ It portrays a man hanging on a cross with another man standing at the foot of the cross looking up to the man on the cross while holding up his hands in adoration and love. Beneath the two figures there is a roughly scratched, almost childishly drawn caption, which reads, "**Alexamenos worships his God.**" If it were a modern piece, I would say it looked like the caption had been scratched with a screwdriver or a pocket knife.

Now you might be thinking, "**How wonderful! How wonderful that God has providentially preserved some ancient artisan's perception of Christianity in first-century Rome.**" If you said that, you would be right. This particular piece of graffiti certainly expresses how this first century artist viewed Christianity.

On the other hand you may be thinking, "**I bet the artist sketched this piece of graffiti to honor some Christian in the act of worshipping the crucified Christ.**" If you said that, you would be wrong, definitely wrong. That was not why he drew this particular piece of graffiti. You see I have purposely left out one small detail in describing the picture. Here's what I didn't tell you. The man on the cross in this particular piece of graffiti has been drawn with the head of a donkey.



Now there are a few scholars who have argued that this particular piece of graffiti shows that the ancient Romans were confused about Christianity. They argue that the first century Romans must have thought that Christians worshipped a god who was half man and half animal. But, of course, that is not what's really going on at all. In fact, you don't have to read very many ancient Roman comedies to realize that the Romans were every bit as vile back then as we are now. They were every bit as profane in the way they mocked

sacred things as many modern comedians are today. They even used some of the same kind of contemptuous language. In mocking others, they were apt to call a person a **“mule, a donkey or even an ass”**.² And that is what is going on in this particular piece of graffiti. You see the artist here was trying to say that he thought the worshipper in his picture was a fool. He was either saying that or that he thought the whole idea of a crucified god was idiotic. You see the artist used this piece of graffiti to relay his attitude toward Christianity and his attitude was one of contempt. The artist sketched this picture implying that he thought Christianity was a **“jackass”** religion. What the artist was trying to do was to castigate both Christians and Christianity. What he was trying to do was to blaspheme the Lord Jesus Christ by saying that the whole idea of Christianity was stupid, moronic, idiotic and empty-headed. He was saying that a careful contemplation of the basic premise of our faith, the idea of a crucified God, ought not to provoke us to adoration. Instead, it ought to cause us to hang our heads low. It ought to cause us to be ashamed.

That is why, I think, that whenever I think about this particular piece of graffiti, my thoughts always turn to *2nd Timothy*. They do so because the idea of being ashamed of the gospel comes up four separate times in *2nd Timothy*. It comes up in *2nd Timothy* 1:8 where Paul tells Timothy not to be ashamed of the gospel. It comes up again in *2nd Timothy* 1:11 where Paul tells Timothy that he, that is Paul himself, is not ashamed of the gospel. It comes up in *2nd Timothy* 1:16 where Paul tells Timothy how Onesiphorus was able to comfort him as he languished in prison simply because Onesiphorus was not ashamed of the gospel. And it comes up in *2nd Timothy* 2:15 where Paul tells Timothy to be a good workman when it comes to handling the Word of Truth so he won't, in the end, have to be ashamed. Now if you were to skip over the introductory part of the letter, the part with the

greeting and thanksgiving...the part we are going to look at this morning...that would mean that in the first two chapters of *2 Timothy* Paul exhorts Timothy four separate times using the phrase **“not ashamed.”** Now I admit that some of Paul’s exhortations are more oblique than others. That is, some are more indirect than others. Paul’s praise of Onesiphorus for example as one who was not ashamed is not a direct exhortation. But it is an exhortation just the same. It is a little like when your wife tells you that your neighbor’s yard is the best looking yard on the street. She may not directly say that she would like for you to get up off the couch and do something to the yard, but you still get the impression that she wouldn’t really mind very much if you did. That’s what I mean by an oblique exhortation.

The real question is of course, **“Why would Paul be so concerned to exhort Timothy to not be ashamed so many times here in the opening of 2nd Timothy?”**

Why would he repeat the idea of **“not ashamed”** four separate times?

I think we all already know the answer to that question.

I don’t think you have to know Greek, or be a forensic linguist, or even be a decent grammarian to figure out why Paul does that. He does that because there is a part of Paul that is a little bit afraid that this young man that he loves so much, this young man in whom he has invested so much time and energy, this young man named Timothy, this young man he considers to be his own dear son, might just be a bit ashamed of both Paul and Paul’s gospel. And it was important to Paul that Timothy not be ashamed...not be ashamed of either him or the gospel. It was important to Paul because in one real sense Paul wants Timothy to take his place...to step up and fill the void that was going to be left by his own impending

death. Now that doesn't mean Paul expected Timothy to become an apostle in his place. The office of apostleship was not Paul's to give out. Rather it means that Paul wanted Timothy to drop his timidity so that he could faithfully watch over those churches to which both he and Paul had ministered. He wanted what was his to become Timothy's. And so, Paul wrote this wonderful little letter to try to get Timothy to snap out of it, to buck up, to play the man, to not cave in to the pressure he felt to turn aside from the gospel because he was ashamed of it or even of Paul.

Now there are any number reasons that we know that's what Paul was trying to do in his letter. We know that partly because of the way he keeps repeating similar verbal ideas...ideas that all quite closely connected...phrases like, **“do not be ashamed, endure suffering, suffer on behalf of the gospel, do not deny, remember, be entrusted, and guard the deposit.”**

But we also know that's what Paul was trying to do because we know that *2nd Timothy* is the last letter he ever wrote. That is, we know this is the last letter he ever wrote that the Holy Spirit chose to preserve. You see Paul wrote the letter we know as *2nd Timothy* while he was in Rome waiting in prison to be executed by the vile human toad Nero. Tradition tells us that Paul was locked away in an underground hell hole called the *Tullianum* which we know today as the *Mamertine Prison*. That tradition may or may not be true. What we do know from the letter *2nd Timothy* itself is that Paul was definitely in Rome, was definitely in chains, and knew with certainty that he didn't have much longer to live.

Justice will explain next week how we know some of that to be true.

Anyway, Paul was locked up in prison in Rome and was in imminent danger of being martyred. And those things are important because Paul took what little precious little time he had left to write his young disciple Timothy in order to build up his faith, to stir up his affections, and to encourage him to be faithful to his calling. He did that because he knew that he that might not live more than just a few weeks or months. Because that's true, I think it might helpful to think of 2nd Timothy as Paul's spiritual last will, and testament. And because that's true and because of the pathos his letter contains I think we can conclude that Paul wrote *2nd Timothy* with his heart on his sleeve. That is, he held nothing back when he wrote it.

Personally, I think *2nd Timothy* is the most personal, most moving, most beautiful letter in all the New Testament...perhaps in all of recorded history. In a sense it is a lot like the Epistle to Philemon...only in *2nd Timothy* the emotional level is ratcheted up to a completely different level because Paul knows he is about to die.

And though Paul was not particularly fearful of death...he was quite fearful, I think, of leaving things untended. So he poured out his heart and soul in this letter to Timothy. I couldn't help but think back to a number of the private conversations I had with my dad after we found out he was dying from cancer. Many of them concerned how he wanted me to do this or do that or care for my mother.

You can just imagine.

And because that's true, no other letter that I can think of really even comes close to the raw power and beauty of *2nd Timothy*. Oh, I guess you could say that the letter written by Sullivan Ballou to his wife Sarah right before the Battle of Bull

Run comes close, or maybe you could say that the letter of Guido DeBres to his wife Catherine just prior to his martyrdom comes close. You could certainly say that the letter written by William Tyndale to the warden of the prison at Vilvoorde where he was locked up away to be tortured and executed comes close. Of those three, I think maybe Tyndale's letter comes closest to displaying the same sort of emotional depth and raw beauty, of course the reason it does, is because it borrows extensively from Paul's original letter here in 2nd Timothy.

Paul's letter, of course, has a certain kind of advantage over these other letters I've mentioned. It is not simply the emotive last thoughts of the great Apostle to the Gentiles. It is also the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God superintended by the Holy Spirit in such a way that it is the very breath of Almighty God reflecting the heart and beauty of God himself. And because that is true it is worthy, more than worthy, of our time and reflection.

Now what I want to do over the course of these next few months is to work our way through 2nd Timothy taking it in rather small chunks in order to try to take in all that Paul has to say to young Timothy and I want to do that with a specific purpose in mind. I want us to love what Paul wanted Timothy to love. I want us to do that because the gospel is in every bit as much danger of being lost today as it was back then. When I say that, I do not mean it is in danger of being ultimately lost. Our faithful covenant keeping God will never allow that. There has always been and will always be a remnant somewhere where the gospel will be loved and treasured. Rather, I mean it is in danger of being lost here in this place that we have all come to know and love. It will always be in danger, and it is our responsibility to make sure it is always guarded.

Alright then, let's start by looking at verse 1.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 1:1**...Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus, ²To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, *mercy*, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

You can see that even here in the beginning of *2nd Timothy* Paul is not writing simply as a sentimental old man, or just as Timothy's beloved mentor. He is both of those things but he is more than that. No, Paul is not writing as simply a sentimental old man or even as Timothy's personal mentor. He is writing to Timothy rather as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is about to pour out his heart and soul to Timothy and yet even before he does that he wants to make it clear there is no demarcation, no dividing line between his affections for Timothy and his public office as an apostle. He doesn't live one life as Paul the private individual and another as an apostle. Paul is always an apostle...always a sent one. His personal Christian faith is not divided.

Now in verse two Paul extends a greeting to Timothy by pronouncing over him the threefold blessing of grace, mercy, and peace.

Our tendency is to read over this initial blessing quite quickly but it really is important. Think of the grace Paul mentions here as God's kindness toward Timothy...a kindness that Timothy not deserve. Think of mercy as God's decision toward Timothy in not administering the judgment that he deserved. Think of the peace Paul extends here as a kind of emotional calm washing over Timothy's soul whenever he remembered that he had been forever made right with God.

It is the same, of course, for us here this morning. We have been extended God's undeserved favor...his undeserved kindness. He has shown us kindness that we truly do not deserve. He has invaded our world and set us free from the tyranny of sin. Was talking earlier this week to my students about the imagery of Plato's Cave and it occurred to me that the gospel is very much like that. It liberates us and causes us to see things as they truly are. I couldn't help but think of those wonderful lines from Wesley's hymn where it says:

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.*

That is what grace does. But God doesn't simply show us kindness. He also withholds the judgment we are due. Well that is not quite right. He doesn't withhold it. He poured it on someone else. He poured it out on the Lord Jesus in our place. Grace is getting what we don't deserve, and mercy is not getting what we do deserve.

I can't help but think of that wonderful story where a young private was brought before General Robert E. Lee during the Civil War for some serious infraction he has committed. He wasn't much more than just a boy and he was brought before the always serious Lee. Lee noticed the boy shaking uncontrollably and trying to comfort him said, **"You needn't worry son, you'll get justice here."** **"I know that General Lee,"** the boy replied, **"that's why I'm shaking."**

Mercy, then you see, is God withholding what we deserve.

Grace is giving us what we do not deserve. Mercy is withholding what we do deserve, and peace is what we gain as a result. Our hearts are quieted by the fact that we no longer have to be afraid. Paul reminds Timothy of all that and reminds us as he does.

I used to work with this brother that would come by my office every Monday morning and open the door of my office and stick his head in and say:

*My sin, oh the bliss, of this glorious thought,
My sin not in part but the whole,
Has been nailed to the cross and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord oh my soul.
It is well, it is well,
It is well with my soul.*

I always loved Mondays when he would do that.

Now before I read verse three I want to tell what to look for. I want you to look for the way in which Paul explains to Timothy that he too comes from a long line of faithfulness...just as Timothy did. I want you to see that because Paul is going to compare Timothy history his own personal history several times in chapter one.

He does it here in verse three by saying something like this, **“I thank God whom I serve as did my ancestors even as I think of you and how you learned your faith from your ancestors.”**

Let’s look at verse three and you’ll see what I mean.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 1:3**...I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I *remember* you constantly in my prayers night and day. ⁴ As I *remember* your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. ⁵ I am *reminded* of your 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. ⁶ **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, ⁷ for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

You see what Paul is doing. He is calling to Timothy to be faithful to what he has learned and believed even as his mother and grandmother were faithful to the gospel. He is calling Timothy to remember God's great covenantal faithfulness. He is calling him to remember God's *hesed*, his everlasting covenantal love. He is reminding him that God has already shown this kindness to his family before him and is now extending that same kindness to him. Paul is reminding Timothy of God's faithfulness with the end in mind that Timothy will show himself to be faithful.

Paul continues his request of Timothy recalling the deep bond the two men share. You can see that as Paul says he remembers Timothy's tears of affection for him. That is probably a reference to Paul's meeting with the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 when they came down to meet him at Miletus, or it may refer to some other tearful meeting where the two men told each other goodbye.³ Anyway, Paul shares that same affection for Timothy and tells Timothy he hopes to see him again, if the Lord allows it, so that he might once again be filled with joy. Paul explains that he always prays toward that end even as he constantly remembers Timothy in his prayers.

Now in verse six Paul finally gets down to his principal concern for Timothy...a concern he will take up throughout the rest of his letter. He does when he says,

“For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift you have from God...the gift that is there because of the laying on of my hands.”

You see Paul’s point is that Timothy has received a wonderful gift of ministry. He has received that gift of ministry from the Lord God Almighty himself. He has received that gift and the gift has been recognized by others to the end that the church has publicly set him apart through the laying on of hands to use his gift. Now like I said we don’t know exactly what that gift was. Paul may have been referring to something very specific like preaching or exhorting or evangelism. Or Paul may be referring to something a lot more general in nature that equipped Timothy in a general way to do the work ministry. But Timothy knew what that gift was. So here’s Paul’s point: **“Timothy, you come from a tradition of faith. You have been equipped by the Spirit of God through the laying on of my hands to fulfill a very important role in ministry...now fan that gift that you have received into a white-hot flame so that it doesn’t die out.”**

The question, of course, is how was Timothy to do that? That is, how was Timothy to fan in flame the gift that he had been given. Well first of all I want you to think about the imagery Paul uses. You can almost see a dying campfire of a few glowing embers in a fireplace somewhere. Paul is saying, **“Do you see those glowing embers Timothy? Fan them. Give them air. Don’t let them die out. Rather, fan them so that glow...so they glow and burst back into flame, and then feed them...give them more fuel and more air so they don’t simply glow but so they flame up with heat and light.”**

Why is Timothy to do that? He is to do that so that he won’t be ashamed and so that he can endure the suffering to which he was called? Of course that is not really

the question. That is, the question is not what Timothy is to do. We already what he is to do. He is to fan into flame the gift he has been given. The question rather how is he to do that? So here's the bad news. The answer doesn't come up until 2nd Timothy 2:1. Still, I don't want to leave you hanging. Timothy is to fan into flame the gift he has been given...he is to be strengthened to fight the fight to which he has been called by the grace God has given him in Christ Jesus. That is, he is not to do so in his own strength but in the strength he has been given though and by God's grace. Still in the immediate context Paul is more concerned about the why than he is the how.

Paul makes this point about Timothy's giftedness and fanning it into a flame because he wants to make a very specific application toward Timothy...the application that I mentioned in my introduction...the admonition that Timothy not be ashamed of either him or the gospel. You can see that in verse eight.

ESV 2 Timothy 1:8...Therefore do not be *ashamed* of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God,

Do you see how Paul is admonishing Timothy? He is admonishing him to not be ashamed of the gospel or of his relationship to Paul but instead to boldly preach the gospel and to do the work of ministry. He is going to tell him to do that even if it means that he too has to suffer as a result.

And why is Timothy to do that? He is to do that because he has been gifted to do that. He is to do that because God has been covenantally faithful to bring him up in a household of faith. He is to do that because of his love for Paul his spiritual father in the gospel.

You see what I mean. Timothy has been saved by the kindness of God not as the result of anything he has done but solely because of the kindness of God who sent Christ into the world to redeem him from his sins. And the end result of all that is that death has been put away and has been replaced by the life and immortality that Timothy now possesses as a result of Christ's great redemptive work.

Do you see what I mean? What Paul says here is just so wise. What he says is something like this, **"Look Timothy I too was appointed to pastoral ministry. I was gifted by the Spirit to do a particular work just like you have been gifted. And here's the thing I am not ashamed. I am not ashamed because I am totally persuaded that God is able to watch over what has been entrusted to me and to guard it until the day I stand before him face to face. And it's the exact same way for you. You've been gifted, so don't be ashamed but follow my example. We've both been gifted and there is no reason for either of us to be ashamed. Do what you've learned from me even if it means you have to suffer. Fan into flame the gift you've been given and by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit guard what has been entrusted to you, buck up and play the man and press on toward the goal."**

Let me close with this.

When Dr. Criswell, the venerable old pastor at First Baptist Dallas celebrated I think it was his fortieth anniversary as the pastor of First Baptist he received a letter in the mail that read something like this:

Dear Dr. Criswell,

Some forty years ago or so, I was in seminary and deeply discouraged. It was the end of my first year and I was pretty much at the end of my rope. I was up in my dormitory room packing my bags to go home never intending to come back. I was giving up on the ministry and I was giving up on the gospel when I heard this young fool walking across campus singing at the tops of his voice. He was singing:

*Man of Sorrows what a name
For the Son of God who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim
Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

Anyway, Dr. Criswell you were that young fool. I listened to you sing...and then I stopped and unpacked my bag and stuck it out and finished seminary and am myself celebrating some forty years in the ministry.

Thank you for not being ashamed and know this I am no longer ashamed myself.

Our God is God.

He is indeed.

Let's pray.

¹ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987; reprint 1993), 560.

² Ibid, 561.

³ **ESV Acts 20:36**...And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷ And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, ³⁸ being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.