



**Brief thoughts
on
2 Timothy 4
(Paul's final words)**

This second letter to Timothy by Paul is a moving one. It is Paul's last epistle and his final written testament to us and to Timothy.¹ Rays of victory amid clouds of darkness occupy the apostle and reach their climax in its fourth and final chapter. Paul is incarcerated in a Roman prison during the infamous days defined by the insanity and iniquity of Nero. His sacrificial departure looms before him. He reflects on the present day and is in deep lament over those who had forsaken him. He also looks into the future under the Spirit's enablement. Again he sees the dreadful specter of advancing apostasy that will challenge the beloved in Christ – especially Timothy, who he lovingly regards as “my own son in the faith.” He is therefore moved by affectionate paternity and his divinely bestowed apostolic authority, to write his final exhortations to Timothy with heartfelt urgency, reflected in the opening imperative, “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom. Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” It is a vital and valiant exhortation, one that we do well to heed today, for we are in the midst of the apostasy foreseen by Paul.

¹ Paul's two letters to Timothy compose two of the final three Pauline Epistles and are dated c. AD 65-68. Their order is as follows. They deal essentially with ecclesiastical subjects.

1. First Timothy
2. Titus
3. Second Timothy

The Chapter

1. I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;
2. Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.
3. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;
4. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.
5. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.
6. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.
7. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:
8. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.
9. Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me:
10. For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.
11. Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.
12. And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus.
13. The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments.
14. Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works:
15. Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words.
16. At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.
17. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.
18. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.
19. Salute Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.
20. Erastus abode at Corinth: but Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick.
21. Do thy diligence to come before winter. Eubulus greeteth thee, and Pudens, and Linus, and Claudia, and all the brethren.
22. The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you. Amen.

Introduction

Before we look at the passage at hand, it will be helpful to those wishing to do further studies in these two epistles, to simply mention the broad distinction and relationship between the first and second epistles to Timothy. The former I suggest, is particularly concerned with the conditions within the *local church* and the *conduct* of the man of God within it; whereas the latter, as I see it, is essentially to do with the conditions within the *professing Church* and the *course* of the man of God in the light of it. This distinction, strangely enough, highlights the relationship between the two epistles in regard to the man of God. I now like to suggest, that the spiritual conditions within a local assembly, will have a significant bearing upon how the man of God sets his course in regard to the conditions within the professing Church. The principle I believe is well established in the departure of the Israelite. When the house of God loses its divine Centre and character, then the man of God is in danger of departure. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the house of Chloe wrote to Paul regarding the carnal conditions at Corinth. It is instructive that when addressing the departed church at Laodicea, the Lord makes no appeal to the church – only to the individual. “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20).

Let us return now to the fourth chapter in second Timothy. Irrespective of the doubt cast over the authenticity of the term “therefore” in verse 1, the theme of the Epistle and the context make it abundantly clear that Chapter 4 is a solemn and searching finale to all that Paul has penned to Timothy

to that point. The context is the apostasy of the “last days” – the final chapter of the Church period (cf the “Latter times” of 1 Tim 4). The nature of the apostasy is reflected in the character of the apostates seen in 2 Timothy 3:5, “having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.” It appears again in verse 3 of Chapter 4. “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.”

There is an instructive practical distinction to be observed between these two chapters however. In Chapter 3, Paul exhorts the believer to *turn away* from (or avoid) the apostates - those having a form of godliness. Here in Chapter 4 he charges that we are to **preach the Word**. The first serves to separate us from the *presence* of apostasy; the latter is to do with our *protection* against apostasy. The preaching of the Word of God is the only antidote to the infectious error of apostate thought.

Chapter Outline

The following headings provide us with an instructive outline of the chapter.

Verses 1-2:	A solemn charge
Verses 3-4:	A serious indictment
Verse 5:	A searching exhortation
Verses 6-8:	A successful testimony
Verse 9-18	A summary reflection
Verses 19-22:	A final salutation

A solemn charge (verses 1-2)

Paul begins his final address to Timothy with a solemn charge or earnest exhortation – PREACH THE WORD. Let us examine the charge and then say something about its solemnity.

The substance of it

The charge is part of a four-fold exhortation: Paul tells Timothy:

1. What to do: Preach the Word
2. Where to do it: The public domain
3. When to do it: In season and out of season
4. How to do it: Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine

What to do - preach the Word

Three things claim our attention here:

- a. The *material* - It is the *Word* that is to be preached – the Spirit-inspired Word of God and not the imaginative words of man, his philosophy, his systems of theology and his religion or what he believes to be the Word of God. What do we mean then by the Word of God?
 - i. Many professing Christians in error have devised their own “Charter,” which is used to interpret spiritual matters.
 - ii. Some evangelical periodicals issue a list telling us what they believe. But their real position is often betrayed by what is *not* listed.

- iii. Then we have a (growing) number of “versions” of the Bible – many of them are nothing but diabolical perversions. Satan is indeed the author of confusion. Though we acknowledge that some improvements can be made to the work of the translators, we have no hesitation in commending the Authorized Version as God’s Word, because of its proven internal and external provenance. There are those who, (for reasons best known to themselves), forcefully prohibit any refinement of the Authorized translation, pronouncing such action to be grievous error. Sadly, as with all extremity, they blind themselves and deprive others of the deep veins of supporting truth that run through the Hebrew and Greek Text.
- b. The *mandate* – to preach “the Word” - Genesis to Revelation.
 - i. To limit the “Word” to the “Gospel,” is to violate the context, void the theme of the Epistle and impede the fight against apostasy. The Word contains the revealed things of God and relate to matters such as sin, righteousness, judgment, salvation, history and prophecy – all of which are evident in this Chapter of 22 verses.
 - ii. Timothy (like the elders of Ephesus) is not to shun delivering “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). The exhortation defers to and is defined by the closing truth of the previous chapter, that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” We are not to withhold any matter just because it will “offend” – “the fear of man bringeth a snare” (Pro 29:25). To do so is to open the door to apostasy.
 - c. The *means* – “preach” the Word. The word in the Greek is *kerusso* which, when used in the NT is associated with “heralding” a message – the claims of God contained in His written Word. It is not here “discussing” or “debating” – but a proclaiming of the Word. Neither is it “teaching,” which is made clear in this very Epistle. Paul says of himself, “whereunto I am appointed a preacher [*kerux*], and an apostle [*apostolos*], and a teacher [*didaskalos*] of the Gentiles” (2 Tim 1:11).

Where to do it - in public

We now have where the Word is to be preached – in *public*, as given by the grammar and context. Although there is no explicit reference to the local assembly in this Epistle (cf the First), we cannot escape the context fixed by the purpose and theme of the letter – the arrival and attack from apostasy. Such was the testimony of the Thessalonians. “For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad” (1 Thess 1:8).

When to do it – in season and out of season

There are times when the preaching of the Word seems “seasonable” – that is, the occasion appears convenient and appropriate to us; other times may appear quite the opposite. However, we are exhorted to “seize the moment” when the opportunity *arises* to preach the Word, because we know not the ways of God and how they flourish. “He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good” (Ecc 11: 4-6). Paul, we recall, was one “born out of due time” (1 Cor 15:8). This does not mean however, that we are to

be capricious and careless concerning proper etiquette and good manners. There is, after all, a time “for every purpose and for every work” (Ecc 3:17). All things are lawful but not all things are expedient! We are to be discerning and wait on the Lord and the leading of His Spirit.

How to do it - reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine

Five imperative exhortations are given and their order is not without significance. To reprove (*elegcho*) is to expose – to bring into the light in order to convict, especially the conscience of error. We have prime applications of it when John the Baptist reprovved Herod for his adultery with Herodias and in regard to the reprovving work of the Spirit of God – of sin righteousness and of judgment; to rebuke (*epitimao*) is to admonish – and no thought here of “scolding” or the use of “sarcasm;” to exhort (*parakaleo*) is to express a prescribed action. These three actions are to be undertaken in the sphere of longsuffering (*makrothumia*) or patience and in doctrine (*didache*) – the application of teaching from the Word of God. Note that apostate *teaching* is to be met first by reproof – the exposure of it which is in the light of “all Scripture.” This does not refer to rebuking the apostate, from whom we are to “turn away.” We must however be uncompromising in regard to both. Further, we cannot help notice that here as elsewhere in his advice to Timothy, Paul presents the importance of **teaching** in protecting and preserving our personal testimony and that of the local assembly to which we belong. It places a solemn responsibility not only upon those charged with the teaching, but also upon others to support it. This responsibility involves giving liberal opportunity for its *recognition, exercise* and *patronage*. Another has said there are two ways to bring in the flock: we can send out the dogs to round them up, or we can provide wholesome food and so create a wholesome appetite for it.

The solemnity of it

We need to dwell a little on this. Paul’s charge to preach the Word is no mere “puff.” It carries with it a grave responsibility. Its magnitude cannot rise to a higher degree, for it is made before the Triune Godhead and its judicial glory vested in Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom. The Lord Jesus Christ is the instrument of divine judgment, for all judgment is committed to the Son (Jn 5:22).

We note here three particulars. There will be:

1. *A future judgment* - the Lord Jesus Christ *shall* judge the quick and the dead.
2. *A future appearance* - this judgment will take place at Christ’s appearing.
3. *A future kingdom* - this judgment will take place at Christ’s appearing and His kingdom.
 - a. The time of this future judgment relates to the Second Advent of Christ – His appearing. The term in the Greek is *epiphaneia* and is best rendered “manifestation.”
 - b. This future judgment relates to “persons” and so it cannot refer to the Judgment Seat of Christ, where the believer’s “works” are judged and rewarded. The latter is in fact referred to by Paul in verse 8. “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” The term “that day” is the “Day of Christ,” the period of time which refers to events in heaven after the Rapture; one of those events being the Judgment Seat of Christ or *bema*.
 - c. Believers love the Lord’s “appearing” because it will be the vindication of the Word of God and the manifestation of His glory on earth. We note a similar thought in Titus 2:13 – but there we have the added aspect of the believers “hope,” for they will reign with Him as heirs

of God and joint heirs with Christ. “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”

4. The judgment spoken of concerns “the living and the dead.” The “living” refers to those who are physically alive at the time of the Lord’s appearance, His Second Advent. During the Tribulation the Gospel of the kingdom will be preached to all. At the end of the Tribulation, of those who are alive, some will have accepted the Gospel while others will have rejected it. Those who have rejected the Gospel of the kingdom will be aligned with the apostates of that day – even those who accept the apostate mark of the Beast. The “dead” refers to all who have died physically in sin – all the unjust dead. They will be judged at the Great White Throne before which will appear all the unrighteous dead, small and great. There will be a 1,000 year time span (the Millennial Kingdom) between the judgment of the living and of the dead.

Why does Paul mention Christ as the Judge of the quick and the dead in this particular exhortation to Timothy? It is because Christ in judgment will bring **an end** to all apostasy and, what is more, His judgment will vindicate the **preaching of the Word** by the faithful of God. We know that the present vein of apostasy will continue after the Rapture into the Tribulation, where it will blossom into the greatest form of apostasy the world has ever seen – the Great Whore, Mystery Babylon and then become personified in the Antichrist – the abomination that maketh desolate.

Revelation 19 – Christ’s Second Advent

“And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia. And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great...And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.”

And so, Paul writes to Timothy and declares, “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”

Dispensational truth

Before we move on it is important to observe the importance when preaching the Word of God to rightly divide it – as Paul reminds us in Chapter 2. “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” This involves knowledge of dispensational and prophetic truth. The rapture of the Church will mark the end of this dispensation – the Church Age. God will then take up Israel again and bring in a 7 year period called the Tribulation, at the end of which Christ will return to earth and establish His 1,000 year earthly kingdom and reign in righteousness. The biblical proofs of these things from both Testaments are manifold. We have one within this chapter which, apparently, has largely gone unnoticed. Observe the two distinct kingdoms – the first is in verse 1, His Millennial kingdom which is associated with His judgment; the second is in verse 18, His heavenly kingdom, which by its very nature cannot be associated with judgment. The former must precede that latter, as judgment must come before eternal righteousness.

A serious indictment – apostasy (Verses 3-4)

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”

Paul has a number of things to say about those who apostatize. There is a coming day when they will not endure sound doctrine. The professing Christian will eventually be caught out because his heart is not convicted regarding the faith. He has been “putting up” with it – but wholesome words have never been held with conviction – being only a matter of profession. The time will come therefore when sound doctrine becomes *unpalatable* and *expendable*. This often comes to light when sound doctrine has to be applied to self or to those linked by nature’s ties.

Sound doctrine is then replaced by false doctrine, and so the apostates bow to their lusts and through itching ears seek out and sponsor false teachers. Their ears are *averted* and become *attuned* to what they regard as some new thing under the sun. But “vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity...and there is no new thing under the sun” (Ecc 1). May we all heed those often repeated words of our Lord – “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Rev 2-3). John warns – “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 Jn 4:1).

We should be aware of the devices employed by these false spirits which are designed to direct us away from the faith. Sound doctrine is:

- *culturalized* – the matter was part of the culture of a past day.
- *dispensationalized* – the matter is only relevant to the people of a past day.
- *spiritualized* – the matter is not to be taken literally.
- *trivialized* – the matter is true but insignificant; it is *legal* – not within the “spirit of love.” One of the more insidious clichés we encounter when stressing the importance of all the counsel of God, particularly in regard to church truth, is that we should not “major on the minor.” It immediately places divine principles into the arena of human subjectivity as to what is a major or a minor matter. Where in Scripture do we find such a division in doctrine?

The progress of apostasy

There is an instructive observation to be made at this point. We find it in Acts 20:29-30, also written by Paul in regard to the church at Ephesus. “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” Verse 29 warns of apostate doctrine *entering* the assembly by false teachers (professing to be believers) coming into it. Verse 30 however warns of men from *within* the assembly propagating apostate teaching. In verse 29, we have the “latter times,” the time immediately after the apostolic period (after my departing). In verse 30 we have the “last days,” the closing days of the Church Age – to which Paul refers in 2 Timothy chapter 4:3.

If we allow the historical record of the Bible to be our guide, then what we see here is the development of apostate activity. In verse 29 the apostates have entered the assembly and planted their leaven. This we may refer to as the first wave in the tide of apostasy. When we come to verse 30, we see that the leaven has done its work and infected those within – “and of your own selves shall men arise, speaking

perverse things.” We may identify this as the second wave in the tide of apostasy - a second generation of apostate activity so to speak and has its essential manifestation in the “last days.”

This is what we have in Chapter 4. The leaven from *without* has entered and done its diabolical business. And so those *within* “will no longer endure sound doctrine.” This is supported by the grammar. “They shall turn away their ears from the truth” (v4). Their ears have been turned away by their own volition – given in the active voice. Then we have – “And shall be turned unto fables” (v 4). Here their turning unto fables is in the passive voice – they are seduced by those to whom they have turned for support. Evidence of this second wave of apostasy is rife within the professing Church today. It is a mark of the Laodicean condition – endemic apathy and apostasy. We might recall here the historical interpretation of the Lord’s letters to the seven churches.

1. Ephesus: Abandoned affection - Apostolic period
2. Smyrna: Endured affliction - Roman Persecution
3. Pergamos: Worldly alliance - Marriage of the Church to the Roman Empire under Constantine.
4. Thyatira: Tolerated apostasy – The Middle Ages – The “mother” Church – Roman Catholicism.
5. Sardis: Lifeless animation - Protestantism.
6. Philadelphia: Righteous awakening - Missionary zeal and revival of biblical truth.
7. Laodicea: Endemic apathy and apostasy - Apathy and indifference to sound doctrine.

A searching exhortation (Verse 5)

“But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.” Four things are identified in this exhortation:

Observation - Watch in all things

In the light of the above a great responsibility devolves on Timothy and indeed all who have been charged with the pastoral and custodial work among the saints of God. It is vigilance – being alert in all things, even watching at the door of the house for it will stem that first wave of apostasy.

Continuation - Endure afflictions

Spiritual afflictions are meant here, for “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim 3:12).

Propagation – Do the work of an evangelist

This simply refers to making known the good news. Though the article is absent and thus it does not explicitly refer to the “evangelist” – the persons who were gifted by Christ as the ascended Head for the perfecting of the Body (Eph 4), we cannot rule out that Timothy was one of these.

Confirmation – make full proof of thy ministry

Timothy was to ensure that his ministry was supported by the principles of the faith – sound doctrine. “It is written” is the prime example given by our Lord.

A successful testimony (Verses 6-8)

As he does elsewhere, Paul presents his testimony to the saints and to Timothy. The passage from here on is particularly heartwarming, for Paul begins to close his written word and contemplate his impending death at the hands of the heathen. We noted earlier that he was incarcerated in a Roman prison. The religious leaders – the bulls of Bashan, and the dogs – the Gentile powers had compassed him as they did the Lord in Psalm 22. Yet, like his Lord before him, he never complained of his lot. We recall his

words to the Philippians. “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need” (Philipp 4:12). We also recall what the Lord said about Paul to a skeptical Ananias regarding his conversion. “For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake” (Acts 9:16). The Lord had led Paul through the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. He suffered at the hands of his brethren after the flesh because of it. “Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one” (2 Cor 11:24). He also suffered under the rod of Rome. However, we know that he held to that divine pledge of assurance given to Him by the Lord Himself – “My grace is sufficient for thee.”

The reason for Paul’s testimony

A record of fighting the good fight, of finishing the course, of keeping the faith and the expectation of a crown of righteousness is peculiar to Paul. I do not get any of this in regard to another apostle. So why did the Spirit of God inspire Paul to include such a testimony and do so here?

Paul, we know, was unique among the apostles. He said of himself that he was one “born out of due time,” the “chiefest of sinners” and the apostle to the Gentiles. His conversion and calling was also unique. Paradoxically, Paul did not come to know Christ through the preaching of the Gospel and he did not have a personal acquaintance with Christ in His humiliation as Jesus of Nazareth. The last the other apostles saw of Christ was Him being taken up in the cloud. Paul’s conversion and calling however begins with an encounter with Jesus as the exalted Christ – above the clouds. Yet, we note that the Damascus road was not the first time Paul had to do with the exalted Christ. We recall that as Saul, the zealous son of Benjamin, he stood by and held the cloak of Stephen as Stephen was being stoned. And for what cause was he stoned? It was because he, (Stephen), “being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55-56). And, we note in passing what Stephen cried to the exalted Christ while Saul of Tarsus was consenting to his death. “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge” (Acts 7:60). One cannot help feeling that this occasion left an indelible impression on Paul. It was not just that he would later claim to be the “chiefest among sinners.” But that during his own persecution at the hand of a detractor, Demas, he would pray to the exalted Christ that “the **Lord** reward him according to his works;” and, in regard to defecting brethren he would ask God “that it may not be laid to their charge” (2 Tim 4:16). It all points to one who was once zealous for the law but thereafter schooled in the provisions of divine grace.

So we see that this particular record of Paul’s testimony is a fitting inclusion because of its singular nature. However, to fully appreciate its inclusion at this juncture we must revert to the first Epistle to Timothy and compare the closing words of Paul to Timothy with those at the beginning. “Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, **which was committed to my trust.** And I thank Christ Jesus our **Lord**, who hath enabled me, for that **He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;** Who **was before** a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: **but I obtained mercy,** because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And **the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.** This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, **that in me first Jesus Christ**

might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.” (1 Tim 1:9-16).

Let us return now to the testimony itself. There are three aspects of it all of which are circumscribed by love - the highest expression of it – *agape*. He is ready to be offered – a sacrificial offering for the faith and for the Lord.

His faithfulness is seen as a:

1. **Contender** for the faith - “I have fought the good [worthy] fight”
2. **Commissioner** in the faith - “I have completed my course”
3. **Custodian** of the faith - “I have kept the faith”

Once more we observe the definite article. The emphasis is upon faithfulness in regard to *the* body of truth as revealed once for all. Paul had a commission in regard to the faith which he had to complete; this involved contending for the faith and being a custodian of it through preaching and practice.

We also have a commission for which we must be prepared to fight – not against flesh and blood, “but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph 6:12).

As a result of his faithfulness as a *contender*, a *commissioner* and a *custodian*, Paul is fully expecting to be rewarded with a **crown** – a victor’s crown. We note a number of celebrated things pertaining to the crown.

1. Its **certainty** – it is *laid up for him* – reserved and waiting his investiture.
2. Its **character** - it is a crown which takes its *character* and *value* from the Person who bestows it. It is not awarded by an earthly king, but by the *Lord* – the exalted Son at the right hand of the Majesty on high; by a *righteous* Judge who arose victorious, who has overcome the world; a crown that stands in marked contrast to the victor’s crowns awarded by the unrighteous judges among men – especially of that cruel and carnal day. It is awarded by One who is Himself the Victor. “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33). “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor 15:55-58).
3. Its **occasion** - it is awarded at the bema – the Judgment Seat of Christ in “that day,” the Day of Christ, as noted above.
4. Its **inclusion** – it is reserved for all “that love His appearing.” Paul looks beyond the Day of Christ (as he does in Titus) to the Day of the Lord – the day of His manifested glory on earth. The expression “all that love His appearing” refers to those whose work for the Lord has been motivated by His appearing in glory -the Lord Second Advent, the Day of the Lord. It is in this sense that their service for the Lord is seen as righteous and hence worthy of a crown of righteousness.

It is vital to understand that this crowning does *not* bestow righteousness. Righteousness is imputed to us at the moment of our conversion to Christ. The former is to do with righteousness in *service*; the latter is to do with righteousness in *standing*.

Again we note the vital importance of rightly dividing the truth and the key part dispensational teaching has in regard to it.

A summary reflection (Verses 9-18)

Paul is now in a reflective frame of mind. He looks back upon his course and identifies those who had been a help and those who were a hindrance to his ministry for the Lord. In this passage we have a mosaic of memories involving.

- Affection
- Desertion
- Opposition
- Defection
- Liberation and preservation
- Delegation

Affection – *love for the brethren*

Paul clearly covets the fellowship of Luke (possibly his attending physician) as well as desiring the profitable companionship of Mark (with whom he once severed the yoke). The desire for fellowship no doubt is accentuated by the deprivations associated with his imprisonment. So we see him asking Luke to come quickly with Mark and bring his cloak, the books (the Scriptures) and the parchments (writing paper). This seemingly simple request brings before us a larger principle in our practical fellowship. There are those among us who may not be imprisoned under the laws of the land, but are under house arrest due to frailty of the flesh. It becomes us therefore to visit them. Moreover, not just to visit, but to come with a cloak, the books and the parchments – those things that will be of value to them physically and spiritually.

Desertion – *love for the world*

“For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica.” Demas forsook Paul – and for what? The love of the *present* world, its attractions and advancements. It is essentially Laodicean. There is an instructive contrast – the Laodicean “man of the world” and the spiritual “man of God” (2 Tim 3:16). How doubly sad for Paul – not just to be abandoned in his high calling for the Lord, but for the base cravings of worldly things. As to the spiritual position of Demas – a mere professor or carnal believer, we know nothing and so we cannot speculate. At any rate, his defection stands in stark contrast to loving the appearing of Christ, noted earlier.

Opposition – *love of evil*

Alexander the coppersmith opposed the ministry of Paul; the identity of Alexander is conjectural. Nevertheless, we know the *nature* of his opposition – he withstood Paul’s words – words which undoubtedly were directed to the furthering of the Gospel. We know also the *degree* of his opposition, for this man says Paul, did me “much evil.” Paul leaves him to the righteous Judge – the Lord who will repay him. Some may regard this as an “imprecatory” request, that is, calling down divine judgment (as we have in the imprecatory Psalms, i.e., Ps 69). This does not seem so here – Paul is simply noting the fact that Alexander the coppersmith and all like him will answer not to Paul, but to the Lord, the righteous Judge, who will judge the quick and the dead.

Defection – love of self

“At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.” How Christ-like in mercy: “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” It appears that when Paul was first arraigned before Caesar, no one came forward and stood by him – fearing retribution and persecution. Paul, who had done so much among the saints and who was widely known for his zeal for them had been forsaken.

Liberation and preservation – love from the Lord

Liberation

“Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.” Note again the corresponding truths implicit in this statement. Paul is the apostle to the “Gentiles.” The Gentiles who were once aliens and strangers to the covenants have been brought nigh. Israel as a nation has been set aside until the Rapture of the Church, after which God will take it up again.

Despite experiencing defection, opposition from men and bondage, Paul could boast of the enduring strength he derived from the Lord. It is the *Lord* who stood with him – the *exalted* Christ. Observe, too, it is not said here that the Lord went *before* me, but that the Lord was *with* me. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Ps 23:4). Further, it takes on a particular character of assurance, one that was given to Stephen who, while being stoned saw the Lord in heaven *standing*.² It is a wonderful expression of the Lord’s love for his own, that He should stand with them in times of persecution. And so we see that the Lord liberated Paul from the lion’s mouth – which we suppose was some event that would have earlier taken his life.

Preservation: “And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” There is nothing here about Paul’s perseverance in the faith being associated with his preservation. As with every believer, Paul was preserved in that he was upon conversion sealed unto the day of redemption and accepted in the Beloved.

Delegation – love for the work

Here is further evidence of Paul’s love for the faith. While in chains he is still concerned for the work and ensures its furtherance in the sending of Tychicus to Ephesus.

A final salutation (Verses 19-22)

“Salute Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus abode at Corinth: but Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick. Do thy diligence to come before winter. Eubulus greeteth thee, and Pudens, and Linus, and Claudia, and all the brethren. The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you. Amen.”

Greetings and salutations are sent to a number of saints. These are familiar names and of themselves speak of a sound personal testimony concerning the faith. How precious that their names are inscribed in the eternal Word of God and even in the Lamb’s Book of life.

² It is perhaps a little ironic. Paul, then Saul of Tarsus was consenting to Stephen’s death and while holding his cloak.