

2 TIMOTHY COMMENTARY

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2 TIMOTHY 1

2 Timothy 1:1—Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life in Christ Jesus.

Paul begins the most personal of his letters with a formal greeting. Timothy had written such letters with Paul, and perhaps Paul wanted Timothy to understand that though these words were affectionate, they also were about important business. In a time where fraud was easier, he would also want to use a customary greeting so that Timothy would know immediately of the letter's authenticity.

Paul always viewed himself as specially commissioned by Jesus Christ. He was not simply a concerned fellow—believer. Paul was one with authority, whose instruction carried the weight of God Himself. This authority was by the will of God given to him. He had not assumed it or taken it on himself. He also reminds Timothy that he was given such spiritual authority by grace, "according to the promise of life in Jesus Christ." Yahweh had promised redemption from sin and the kingdom of darkness, from the curse of sin through the provision of a substitute for humanity. This had been realized by Paul through faith, but that only by Yahweh's grace.

So Paul was a man of spiritual authority by special commission and by what we refer to as experience. He had been commissioned by God and he had lived the life. He had done and become that which he preached that others should do and become. He was what he was because of a unique work, but also because of the work that God has promised to do and all who will simply trust his word. Faith is the victory that enabled Paul to overcome who he instinctively was.

1:2—To Timothy my beloved son; Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Timothy and Paul had a special relationship. Paul had been a father to him in the spiritual sense and felt a special responsibility for his well-being. As such a one he blesses Timothy with what every Christian needs.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the greatest blessing anyone can hope for is for grace, mercy and peace from God. Grace provides us with favor, special favor. There is not a moment in life in which we do not need it from God if we understand the true nature of life and its events. Mercy we need always because there is not a situation in life that we are able to do one hundred percent as we ought to do. In all we do we fall short, and by the standards of God's justice that should end our relationship to Him. It does not because of his inexhaustible mercy. We also need peace because the more we understand of ourselves, of God's heart, of our enemy and of people's need the more turmoil we would experience, the less rest we would find and the greater concern and anxiety we would experience. We must always be finding peace in knowing his sovereignty in all matters. All we need to finish the race well is grace, mercy and peace from God.

In all of Paul's epistles he opens with a blessing to the effect of God's grace and peace being upon the readers. His two letters to Timothy add mercy. This may have been done with some of Timothy's personal traits such as his timidity and youth in view.

1:3—I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day,

There are multiple statements regarding human sinfulness in Scripture inspired by God from two perspectives. The one perspective is to look at individuals compared to the character of God. From that perspective "there is none righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10). It is, of course, the right perspective in terms of what is true in the absolute sense and by the standards of future divine judgment. The other perspective given frequently in Scripture is to look at individuals compared to the mainstream of fallen, unrepentant humanity. In that sense there are righteous people and unrighteous. Among the righteous there are even more and less obedient people.

It is critical to note in what sense a statement about sinfulness is being made. When Paul speaks here of serving God with a clear conscience, he is not speaking of being sinless. He is speaking as an imperfect man who had sinned and would continue to sin, but he was not conscious of unresolved sin in his life. He repented of sinful patterns rather than willingly practicing them and then concealing them. There was nothing covered up by Paul which if discovered would discredit him as a spiritual leader. There were no hidden patterns which if exposed would reveal that his own walk with God was anything less than what he claimed. This is what is meant by a clear conscience and in Paul's mind it was critical for a leader to have such a conscience.

Paul points to tradition among the Jews of such a lifestyle, likely pointing to clear back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Their lifestyle was not righteous in the absolute sense. But it was one of faith. Their faith helped them recover from various lapses. It shaped the general course of their lives aside from their imperfections. Their consciences were "clear" in that sense. They hung on to the direction given by faith in the promises of God even in the wake of periodic lapses.

This statement of "clear conscience" is given in passing as Paul expresses his thankfulness for Timothy. There was that in Timothy that was a great blessing to Paul and a significant treasure. He wants Timothy to know that. The family of God needs to voice that to each other and affirm continually one another's value.

We also receive re-affirmation in this statement that Paul was a man of prayer. Paul's prayers were not confined to a prayer time. Prayer was something he carried on night and day. We can say that Paul was who he urged all Christian to be—not just people who pray but prayerful people. In these prayers thankfulness is constant and this likely is what helped Paul be so optimistic and energetic in the face of overwhelming challenges. In prison all Paul could do was to pray. And he did.

1:4—longing to see you, even as I recall your tears, so that I may be filled with joy.

The other side of Paul's emotional attachment to Timothy is expressed here. He misses him. He desires his companionship deeply. He knows he will be filled with joy through being able to see Timothy again. We don't know what tears of Timothy Paul is recalling here. There are number of possibilities. They could be tears of his conversion experience. They could be tears shed together with Paul during ministry (see Acts 20:17–31), they could have been tears shed in their last goodbye. But they were symbolic of the spiritual and emotional bond between them.

1:5—For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I'm sure that it is in you as well.

Timothy was part of a legacy of faith. He was the product of a believing grandma and a believing mother. Theirs was a sincere faith. Faith was not an act with them, nor was it a peripheral part of their lives. It was sincere. We don't know who the men were in Timothy's life, specifically his father and grandfather. Perhaps this is why he was somewhat timid and why it was Paul that had to summon up his courage. There may have been an absence of a male role model completely or at least one of faith.

It is a great asset to have been raised by people of faith. It is equivalent of much by way of formal religious training. Children raised around sincere faith tend to catch it. Those raised around insincere faith usually can't get beyond that. Those raised with no faith may or may not come to faith. The privileges to grow up around those of sincere faith is enormous. There is no greater legacy that can be built.

1:6—and for this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

A spiritual heritage is a wonderful beginning and a great asset. It is not a guarantee of one's own spiritual success. Everyone must take what is in his hand and rise to the challenge God places before him and then he must keep rising to it over the course of a lifetime. Paul calls Timothy to this process.

It is easy for ministry to become a series of tasks that we go through without consulting the Holy Spirit and perhaps even without fully engaging our minds. We need to be aware of this great danger. It is possible for a person of faith to exhibit all the signs and stench of spiritual death. All that is required is neglect. All one must do is nothing.

Kindling afresh our gift is a matter of approaching the assignments of ministry spiritually. It means more than just showing up and carrying them out. It often means getting back to the thoroughness of spiritual preparation you exercised in the beginning of your calling. It means being concerned with uttering not just good words but God's words. That means confessing one's wanderings and sin and seeking to be perfectly in tune with the Holy Spirit. It comes through things like repentance, confession, thanksgiving, submission, hard study, creative thought, and mostly just listening to the Spirit's voice through the Scripture. Experience might give one a certain eloquence or smoothness of speech. But it will not bring a divine power or unction to one's words. This comes as we fan into flame His fire in our souls.

We do not know beyond doubt the gift Paul is referring to here. It could be the salvation experience. It could be the gift of the Holy Spirit. It could be a spiritual gift for service. I believe that the following verse indicates that it was the latter, though I do not know for sure what that spiritual gift was. We are told here only that it is a gift of God. We know then that God is the source of it not Paul and not Timothy.

We know that this gift came about in some sense through the laying on of Paul's hands. While it is impossible to say with certainty how this worked, it is likely that Paul was led by the Spirit to commission Timothy for some specific work in the churches. Paul sensed that Timothy was God's man for that job, meaning that Timothy had been called and designated by God as His choice for that role, whatever it was. Paul then laid hands on Timothy, likely in a public gathering of the church and in this way demonstrated God's approval and designated Timothy as one under apostolic authority to do that which God was calling for him to do. This was an ordination of sorts through which Timothy was recognized as God's man for specific ministry.

We must acknowledge however, that this was not just a formal ceremony. It was a spiritual one in which something spiritual happened. What happened was that Timothy's gift, some spiritual ability to carry out specific ministry, was either conveyed to him for the first time, or more likely it was energized in him for the accomplishment of his mission. Whatever this all entailed it is instructive.

It seems to me most likely that we should understand this in this way. We are created with a certain giftedness that is a product of how God has woven us in the womb. That giftedness and potential resides in us until a moment such as this that Timothy experienced through the laying on of hands by Paul. At that time the gift became spiritual, that is, energized specifically and perhaps fully by the Holy Spirit to be used to accomplish spiritual objectives and achieve specific spiritual results. That it happened through the laying on of hands shows that in some sense the recognition of God's community of people of a calling is significant. In such formal recognition as orchestrated by the Holy Spirit, our gifts may be energized so that they become spiritual instruments not simply a means of getting things done.

The significant thing in this statement of Paul's however is the idea that one's gift needs to be kindled afresh. We need to revisit our ministry roots and keep our gifts spiritual, energized by and in harmony with the power and leading of the Holy Spirit. If we fail to do this our ministry loses its edge. We might still do the tasks. We might even perform them quite well. There might even be a blessing of sorts. We know the Lord always blesses His word. Organization and administration have in themselves a certain ability to create and sustain momentum. But the worker can lose their intimate connection to God. If that happens to us there will be a sense to us that it is all just work that we are doing. We will find less and less joy in it. Burnout is just around the corner.

1:7—for God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.

Timidity has many different looks to it. There is the timidity that makes us speak the wrong things. There is the timidity that makes us shut our mouths and blend in. There is the timidity that makes us say less than what the Spirit would want us to say. There is the timidity that makes us believe that we are simply not up to the task. There is the timidity that makes us shy away from disapproval.

Timidity is not a fruit of the spirit. Whenever a situation makes us afraid, we can be certain that at that moment is the work of another spirit, not the Holy Spirit. We get past a few obstacles and seize several moments for the Lord when we realize the great truth of this verse.

In America we have become increasingly a people who live by our fears. Fears set our agenda. They determine how we parent our children, how we invest our money, what we do for our careers, what kind of cars we drive, and worst of all what happens in our relationship to the Lord. If we could somehow examine all the work of the Lord that is not completely done or left undone entirely, we would likely find that in most cases fear of some kind is the culprit. Fear that the Lord was not with them was the continual plague of the Israelites. It incited the Lord's anger against them regularly. It was the essence of their testing of Him that he so loathed.

But to speak like this of only what the Spirit doesn't do means we are looking at the smallest corner of the picture. Paul speaks of one thing the Spirit doesn't do. But then he quickly speaks of three things that Timothy can count on God's Spirit to produce in him. The first of the three is power. The Spirit lends power to our work for the Lord that is far beyond our own intellectual or emotional power. He can and does give us power to endure physically and emotionally far beyond our limits. Paul's phrase rendered in the NASB simply as "a spirit of power," can legitimately be understood as "THE Spirit that produces power." The Holy Spirit's every effort is designed to bring divine power to bear on our personal lives and on the lives of others through us. His power causes us to feel his presence in our souls and causes others to sense His presence in us. It is power along with the other two things Paul mentions here that give the aroma of life to those being saved and the aroma of death to those perishing.

The Holy Spirit is secondly the Spirit of love, meaning the Spirit that produces love. In the world of ministry, we find that it is essentially a world of relationships. With relationships there is an insatiable need for love. It is the thing that breaks down walls erected by the fear and the hurt produced by evil. Our evil produces all that damages and destroys relationships. The Holy Spirit produces what heals relationships and puts them on solid footing. The power the Holy Spirit enables us to rise above the various human reactions we might naturally have to others, to the high ground of love. The Holy Spirit can displace our own suspicion and defensive reaction with love, even if it means being taken advantage of. He can and does give us the ability to see past the evil in others to the intrinsic value God has placed on their soul. Love is the reason we can pray as Christ did, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." This love enables us to see ourselves and others as God does. We are enabled to look past transgression and instead see value because of Christ work. We are enabled to address human needs wisely and compassionately, understanding them as the scar tissue of evil.

Where there is love there is its companion discipline, for there is no more noble discipline to practice than love. The Holy Spirit produces this third thing Paul mentions. Discipline is the ability to rule ourselves. The Holy Spirit strengthens us to correct our course. He gives impulses to us that lead us to do what we should as opposed to what naturally just happens. He enables us to take intentional action as opposed to reaction. Where discipline is present there comes to be the ability to stay the course rather than abandon it.

In view of our moral handicap brought about by the fall of Adam and our resident sinfulness, discipline is essential to God's reclamation process. This process of His, what we call sanctification, is the rebuilding of our lives carried out by the Holy Spirit in the process of time. There are times He inspires us to self-discipline. There are other times life disciplines us and He helps us to see it is that, rather than just hard-luck. We have a continual need for course corrections, and the Holy Spirit is the one who does this great work of discipline in us. Discipline is the core of the process that makes us spiritually mature.

And so, because there is this threefold activity happening in our being through the Holy Spirit there is no need to submit to timidity or fear. There is every reason to stir up and fan into flame the gift that has been placed in us and to boldly and aggressively serve the Lord with it. These three things describe the fragrance of Christ (2 Corinthians 2:14ff), that “Christ smell” in us that God smells. These are the key elements of the character of Christ bestowed on us. They are such that they awake varying responses in those around us. They are attractive to those who are right with Christ, and they repel those who are not. But there is not a grander journey to be on than this journey of reclamation energized by the Holy Spirit.

1:8—therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God.

To be timid is to not fully exercise one’s gift. It is to fail to do those things God is leading you to do. It is to back away from the testimony of Christ. It is to fail to pass on and speak His words and principles. It is to not rise to Jesus’ example, who always did with the Father was doing (John 5:19–24). It is to break ranks with all who followed Jesus from the beginning. In Timothy’s case it was to break ranks with Paul. In our case it is to break ranks with many generations of faithful men and women. We must rise above timid faith!

Paul’s command to Timothy was to become a sufferer of evil with him for the advantage of the gospel. That is the literal force of Paul’s command. It is a challenge to step up. But with it there is a promise of God’s mighty power standing ready to enable and energize such a step. It is not vain bravado this challenge, of the sort that manipulates the ignorant to the advantage of those with power. It is simply the right thing to do, the only thing that makes sense in terms of the realities of God’s magnificent plan for all of humankind. In that plan the testimony of Christ is everything. His testimony was of the truth about God, His holiness and His grace, His judgment and His mercy. His words were not more theory about God but were the very words of God himself. Jesus’ testimony of God was impeccable, flowing from a perfect life. Jesus’ words and actions were the authoritative word of God. Jesus was God made visible. It is a testimony to the power of evil that we could be ashamed of such a testimony.

1:9—who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which are granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity,

We received two things from God, salvation and a calling. By salvation, Paul is referring here to our rescue from the plight of spiritual ignorance, and God’s impartation of spiritual health to us through the truth as it is grafted into us in the person of God’s holy Spirit. Through that work God’s purpose is made clear for our lives. God calls us through His Spirit to a life that is set apart from the normal human experience. It is a life that is a hard but wonderful journey to spectacular destination. This is the holy calling to become something, not just to do something.

This comes to us not because we reach a point of deserving it. There is one thing that is abundantly clear in Scripture and almost completely lost in terms of human thought. The entire message of Yahweh’s written revelation is a message of grace. It is the story of God’s riches being made available to us at Christ’s expense.

The Old Testament painted that picture through countless symbols. It tells the story of men and women who demonstrate the intricacies of that truth. Through both their successes and failures the need for God's grace and its consistent present are clearly borne out. The New Testament is the story of Christ, the reality that all the symbols pointed to. We receive much from God the moment we turn to Him and none of it is earned. None of it can be earned were one to set about trying. It comes simply because He planned it that way and brought it all about by becoming a man Himself known as Jesus Christ. He lived a perfect life and then took our place and was judged for our sin so that we could be forgiven by His just standard.

This was Yahweh's plan established in eternity past and carried out to perfection in the realm of time in which we live. This is the favor He has done for us. We owe Him, yet we don't! That's the message of grace.

1:10—but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and the immortality to light through the gospel,

The grace of God has been plainly shown. It has moved from the realm of the shadows and types of the Old Testament, from being something humanity could hopefully anticipate, into the plain light of day through the appearance of Jesus Christ. This had to happen at some point. Everything pointed to the word of God becoming flesh. The Person without sin had to come on the scene to take our place, freely bearing our sin. His life and His death made God's deep love and magnanimous grace plain and we could even say public. The wraps were taken off it.

The word revelation means to unveil. Through the actions of Jesus all this mystery, doubt and speculation about God's grace was removed. What was done through Jesus Christ would bring about the abolishment of death, spiritual death and so physical death. Life and immortality have been brought to light. Previously they were wished for and hoped for. But they did not seem possible. Now they are available because through Christ and specifically through belief in Him we can be forever made right with God, spiritually alive. Through belief we are inhabited by God's Spirit and intimacy with God is restored. There is no longer unresolvable alienation between us and our Creator. Through Jesus we have gained spiritual life and so eventually immortality.

This great truth has been brought out into the light. It can be embraced fully by any who will believe in Jesus' work in their behalf. It is good news and it has spread throughout the world. This truth is being fought against with great zeal by the evil one who would blind human eyes to it so they will remain his slaves isolated from the experience of such life (2 Corinthians 4:4). Satan is undetected as he recruits them to fight against all semblance of the gospel. Somewhere they resist the truth of grace and so become vulnerable to the lie and so become absolutely blinded to the truth. At that point right becomes wrong, evil becomes good, Satan becomes God, and God's work becomes Satan's. But it need not be so because the truth has been plainly lived out by God himself when He became a human and lived among us. What had been conceived and intricately planned by God in eternity past, has now been made plain.

1:11—for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher.

Paul saw himself as having three roles. He was a preacher. A preacher is one who makes a proclamation. He communicates that which people do not know and need to know. In this case Paul was an announcer of the good news of God's grace and its fundamental principles.

Paul was also an apostle. An apostle is one who is an official representative with special authority and the commission to act on behalf of the one who commissioned him. Paul acted in official capacity because he had been trained and equipped and empowered to do so. The word "apostle" described how Yahweh viewed Paul. God had been made Paul sufficiently aware of the issues connected with the mission that he was a perfect mouthpiece for Him.

Paul was also a teacher. He not only proclaimed the message of God but taught its principles, made it plainer and explained its intricacies. He was the one used of God to place in writing its defense and a thorough articulation of it. To this he was appointed, and this became his life work. To a certain degree we exist as part of God's family and we carry on His mission because Paul accomplished his mission. He faithfully did all three.

1:12—for this reason I also suffer these things, but I'm not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed in and am persuaded that he is able to guard what I've entrusted to him until that day.

Paul was willing to suffer for one reason, because he realized that he been appointed by God to this work of being a preacher, an apostle and a teacher. If this work required suffering, then suffering was his lot because he did not wish to exercise his option of setting aside his calling. This was the reason he was currently in prison and would soon lose his life. He was willing to do so. He did so without shame. He did so without regret.

Paul did all this with confidence. He is unaffected by any thought that he was risking anything. He had everything to gain and nothing to lose by being faithful. He is confident because of WHO he believed in not because of what he believed in and that is an important idea. We often speak of what we believe and how important it is, and that is true. But we must remember that we really believe in a person. All that makes up our belief system is important, but only in the sense of enabling us to rightly articulate the person we have come to believe in, Jesus Christ.

Paul had great confidence in Jesus. He knew this God/Man. He knew His character, His power, His values, His ways, His past, His present and His future. These things that Paul had set aside that were important to him personally, he entrusted to Jesus who was watching out for them. Paul set aside his own pursuit of happiness. He set aside his own comfort and fulfillment. Most of all he had set aside the vision that all of humankind have had since Adam, to be a master of their own destiny and to lay hold of their "piece of the pie."

All this Paul entrusted to Christ. This is a very strategic step in life that shapes our experience of eternity. Until we do this, until we entrust all this life of ours to Jesus, we will not achieve much of a life in the Spirit. If we're seeking to "get ours," even our service for the Lord can simply be for the current joy or status or sense of fulfillment it gives. The Christian who is in touch with Christ is never quite at home in this life. There is an itch in them for eternity because that's where their hope is for happiness, contentment, fulfillment and the like. That is where their treasure is and where their heart is.

Paul was not reticent to invest all he had and was in the work of God, because he knew that God could be trusted to make him happy and content once the work was done. Paul knew the one he had entrusted these things to, and he was absolutely persuaded that this one could be trusted to deliver those things to him on a grand scale when his time to do so arrived.

As we sing together and talk together within the family of God, one cannot help but notice that there is little talk of heaven. There is much talk of the beauty Christ might be able to bring to our lives now. That was not the talk of Paul. That is a different experience than what Paul embraced. His was a faith in a Person to whom he strove to be faithful in every thought and action. He trusted that one not to make it up to him in this life, but in eternity. This life is about work, even long, arduous labor and suffering. Eternity is about rest and reward. There is blessing here, but to look for it all here will lead to great disappointment. Paul knew what time it was. He hoped for the daytime would end.

1:13—Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

In this verse and in the next, Paul gives Timothy two commands. Both commands have to do with something very valuable that Timothy had received. We have received it as well, but it is something we think very little of today.

Imagine if you owned the instrument that was the standard for what an inch, or a foot, or any fraction of them was. It would be a great treasure in terms of its earning potential. Imagine if all were required to certify their devices for measuring these things through you.

Paul had given to Timothy a standard by which all spiritual thought or supposed spiritual thought could be judged. It was a standard by which truth could be established and error could be clearly identified. It was a great treasure in terms of its potential to promote spiritual health. It was a "device" by which the soundness (literally the "health"), of thoughts could be judged. It could help Timothy find his way through the vast maze of thought that has always existed where spiritual things are concerned. More importantly, it could help the entire family of God stay on course.

The first command Paul gave to Timothy regarding this standard was to retain it. The word rendered "retain" in the NASB is simply *ἔχε*, meaning "have it." Paul's thought was that Timothy should apply that standard. We might have said, "use it!" It is good advice because over the years it has been too easy for leaders not to apply a standard to what is taught and articulated as truth in their sphere of influence. It is good that such a standard exists, it is better when those placed in authority use it. They are to do so in faith and love.

Anytime a standard is enforced, these two things are required. The leaders and followers must trust such a standard. They must have faith in it, not only that it is true, but that there is special benefit and blessing involved in retaining it. They must have faith that it is worth not setting aside because it is always easier to ignore it rather than to retain it. Second, they must hold on to such a standard in love, so as not to damage those who ignorantly embrace that which is not healthy. It is easy when defending a standard to become defensive and arrogant, and so to defend Christ's truth, but not in Christ's way. When love is set aside, there will always be collateral damage. The same faith and love demonstrated by Christ in His life and the faith and love produced in us by His Spirit, are to accompany the use of this standard to judge the relative health of doctrines and movements. The result will be healthy minds, made so by the standard, and healthy souls, made so by the faith and love accompanying the standard.

1:14—Guard through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.

This is Paul's second command regarding the standard by which the relative health of different spiritual thought was to be judged. He rightly refers to this standard as a treasure. It is! It is a treasure because it can ensure spiritual health, which in the end is more critical than physical health, emotional health, or financial health.

Paul's command is that Timothy guard it. It is easy for a standard to slowly erode. Timothy would have to be on guard against both the slow erosion of the occasional drop of water, and the sweeping destruction of the flash flood. He would be able to do so with the help of the Holy Spirit who was in him. The Spirit would enable him to see subtle dangers that undermine the truth in strategic spots. The same Spirit would enable him to withstand the popular waves and trends of his time that would sweep through the Church.

Each generation has had its "pop theology" that runs its course, and which must be graciously but firmly guarded against. The enemy is constantly attacking in some way the underpinnings of the truth. Good spiritual leaders don't simply do a good job executing the tasks of the mission, they are good caretakers of the truth for future generations.

1:15—You are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.

The best of spiritual leaders has the experience of having some turn away from them. Paul was used to such a reaction from unbelievers, and from apostate teachers. Had those he was referring to been such, he likely would not have mentioned it. It seems likely that the two individuals specifically named were specially regarded in the Church. It also seems that they were not isolated cases but were part of a very widespread trend in the Asian Churches, which owed their very existence to Paul.

This turning away from Paul could have been a relational turning away. They could have become "ashamed of his imprisonment" (see verse 8 along with verse 16), and turned away from him, fearing that association with him might bring greater persecution on them. This is supported by logic, specifically the fact that it is unlikely that all in Asia had turned away from his doctrine, particularly in Ephesus where Timothy was.

On the other hand, the possibility of a doctrinal turning away is raised by the context. Could such a turning away be the reason why he was urging Timothy to maintain the standard of sound words, because churches were turning away from this standard in droves?

Whichever the reason, both are common experiences that must be borne by the leader. There is pain in these words of Paul, and every spiritual leader has felt that pain when those they have nurtured and poured themselves into turn away. Paul had felt something dear slip away. It is an intense pain, but we must remember as leaders that it is not our pain that makes something wrong. We must not allow the wrong we feel personally to become paramount, or we will become embittered and give the flesh great opportunity. The Lord will minister to that pain, as the next verse will show.

If the turning away is doctrinal, our heartache must be for the loss of truth, the pain to the body of Christ, and the inevitable consequences that come with it in the lives of all who turn aside. If the turning away is relational, it may be that in the long run it is necessary for the health of the movement, when God knows the work must be prepared to move forward in our absence. In that case there may be sin committed against us, but as in the case of the sin committed against Joseph by his brothers, God will work it for good (Genesis 50:19-20).

1:16—The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chains.

God has faithful people always, through whom He can and will bless us. Naomi, who thought God had dealt very bitterly with her, was given Ruth, a Moabite, who brought blessing to Naomi and so she became the great grandmother of David. We must not forget that we are never alone. We not only have God, but we have His faithful ones who refresh us with their company. Paul had been forgotten by many but not by Onesiphorus, who somehow was in Rome from Ephesus. He visited Paul in his imprisonment often and ministered to him in his trial. Such people are of great value to God and to us. We should hold them in high regard and in a place of special honor.

The word for “refreshed” is a compound, ἀναψυχεν, formed from the word for “soul,” or “self,” or “life,” and a word which when used in compound gives the meaning “up.” So we could say that Onesiphorus “up-souled” Paul or lifted his spirits. We can see by Paul’s statement not only what Onesiphorus had meant to him personally but that the Lord valued such deeds in a special way and could be expected to reward such merciful action with special mercy on the day when Onesiphorus stood before Him to give an account of His life.

The term mercy describes our reward for faithfulness well, because we could never in the purest sense deserve a reward from the Lord. His dealings with us are all merciful. Perhaps Onesiphorus had the gift of showing mercy. It is a gift that makes its bearer such that they do not shun or become embarrassed by the difficulties and special needs of those who have in some way become afflicted.

1:17—but when he was in Rome, he eagerly searched for me and found me

Onesiphorus had put forth special effort to locate Paul. We don't know how Paul's imprisonment worked, but it is likely that in those times the prisoners were the forgotten ones. There may have been several different places in Rome where prisoners were kept and the records of who was where were likely sketchy. Onesiphorus had to be persistent to find Paul and when he found him Paul sensed an eagerness, a joy at having gained the opportunity for his company. While Paul was out of sight and out of mind to many, Onesiphorus was different, and this alone had to be very refreshing. We never know how much just our persistence to look up and spend time with someone can mean.

1:18—the Lord grant to him to find mercy from the Lord on that day—and you know very well what services he rendered at Ephesus.

Paul, a second time asks for divine mercy to be bestowed in a special way on this friend. It is important to realize that Paul is not petitioning the Lord on behalf of Onesiphorus' salvation from punishment. Onesiphorus, as a believer, is already forgiven for his sins and headed for heaven. Paul's request is regarding his reward—for special, undeserved favor on the day when he stands to give an account to God for his management of his own life regarding the truth (1 Corinthians 3:10-15, 2 Cor. 5:9-10).

We see in this that even our rewards that God will grant for our faithfulness are mercies. They are not something that we "have coming." However, the fact must not escape us that we can count on the Lord to reward our acts of service to Him and to His children, even though we owe Him far more than the value of such acts. Such reward is a mercy, because it is He who has given us the ability and the power to do such things. But it is the nature of grace to grant such undeserved favor. Onesiphorus had faithfully served the mission. We do not know the nature of his service, but we do know its quality, and that is what God is concerned with (1 Corinthians 3:13). We also know that the Lord knows, has kept track, has been moved, and will reward all who do such things (Matthew 25:31-46).

2 TIMOTHY 2

2:1—You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Paul has given Timothy several commands that relate to the idea of not being ashamed of being bold and intentional in terms of how he would live. At that time many were shying away from Paul and more critically from the mission he had embraced. This was not the time to let up. This is not to suggest that there is a time to let up, but there are times when in the Lord's leading, we are called to rest. The people in Asia were not resting, they were quitting and letting the trials sap their determination and any sense of momentum.

Paul appeals to Timothy as his son in the Lord. He was more than an assistant and co-worker. They shared a bond within. Surely Timothy would not let him down. Surely, he could be counted on to persist. And so, Paul gives this exhortation to Timothy, to be continually strengthened by the grace that flows from God to us because of Christ Jesus.

Through the Holy Spirit, Christ always grants favor for each moment so that we can be faithful to His purpose and plan in that moment. He is trying to accomplish something through us in it. His grace, **God's Riches At Christ's Expense**, is always flowing our direction. There is nothing He asks us to do by our own strength. That is a remarkable reality. It means that "I can't," is never a legitimate reply to anything the Lord leads us to do. He is able and so are we if we can trust Him. We must be strong in that grace. Being strong in grace involves trust, and trust involves courage.

2:2—And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

Four spiritual generations are mentioned in this verse—Paul, Timothy, those Timothy would teach, and those they would in turn teach. The mission of Christ depends on multiplication. The task is not simply spreading the gospel. It involves looking for people of a certain character and calling/gifting. It involves finding those who are faithful and able to teach and placing them at the helm. It involves entrusting something to them or depositing something with them for safe keeping. It builds on the idea expressed earlier by Paul that Timothy had been entrusted with something he should carefully guard, the standard of sound words (1:13-14). Now Timothy is being told to pass this standard along strategically.

Timothy's charge was not a matter of just keeping the standard safe. That could be done by keeping it secret, or by creating a group within the group that would be "in the know." On the contrary, the purpose of the mission was and is to spread the truth, to pass it around while making sure its quality endures. It involves communicating a specific message, but also furthering a mission and a movement. Any movement demands leadership, and this is Paul's thought on how leaders and leadership would be supplied to Christianity. And so, besides spreading the message of the truth, Timothy was to strategically choose people who would be faithful and who would be capable of influence. These he would make sure understood the intricacies of the gospel message so that they would be equipped to manage the movement well and keep it on course. Their mission would be the same, to pass along the standard by which the movement could be kept on course to others who would be faithful. In this way, years of progress could be insured and progress in out-of-the-way places could be assured. The movement would endure and expand if the principles of this verse were embraced. Whenever the movement has bogged down, it is likely that these principles have in some way been sacrificed.

2:3—Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

Suffering hardship goes hand in hand with being a soldier. It is not an overstatement to say that many who have lost their lives in combat were likely first worn down and made vulnerable by the hardships of being a soldier. There is the emotional hardship of being separated from family and all that is familiar, of being constantly at risk, of the sights of death and great trauma. There are the physical hardships of the elements, of a lack of food, of being deprived of sleep, of living with injury. It is a life in which one's success and effectiveness is determined to a large degree simply by the ability to be at one's best despite hardship. It is the ability to push it all out of your mind. Having one's life threatened usually helps in the moment but can traumatize in the aftermath.

Now in the purely human realm, such endurance is largely a mental challenge in which one must exercise emotional control. The spiritual man understands the resource of the Holy Spirit living within, to where the challenges can be risen to and met by faith. Such a person is spared the emotional damage that can come in the process known commonly as "battle hardening." And so, it is often the case that a faithful Christian becomes healthier emotionally and less scarred even as they endure great peril, due to the grace of God acting in them. It is in fact the case that any situation, including physical battle and warfare, that an obedient Christian finds themselves in while pursuing the will of their Lord, can be approached by faith with these results. They will survive it and they will be better because of it. It is the daily miracle of grace. Obedient Christians can also be scared by such things and then find healing by His grace in the aftermath.

But it is safe to say that in some sense God's grace empowers his "soldiers" to endure, and to gain something in the process of enduring the various hardships. His word is not the story of being wealthy, healthy and prosperous. It is the story of becoming like Christ in one's character regardless of and quite often despite the level afforded of wealth, health, and prosperity. The battle is fought well by those who decide to endure and then by His grace are enabled to do so. They find that for which they can be thankful each day and move forward against overwhelming odds. These are the heroes.

2:4—No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a servant.

The question is, are we behaving as if we are activated for service to our Lord, or are we behaving as if we are now on inactive duty? Being an active soldier assumes placing on hold the “normal” pursuits of life. It is not enough to be “on call,” or available. It is a matter of freeing oneself to pursue the mission of the commander having set aside all other conflicting demands. It is a matter of following His orders and so pleasing Him.

The imagery of “entangled” is vivid. In ancient warfare it was fatal to have one’s physical movement impeded in any way. Today it is less so but still perilous. Then it was impossible to have any kind of concern for the “normal affairs” of life. Today through improved communication it is possible to some extent, but still not practiced. Two independent sets of demands will ultimately conflict, and one will find themselves “caught up,” suffering from divided loyalties, doing neither job well.

Now what “affairs of everyday life” was Paul referring to? We know that he was not against earning a living or managing with care the affairs of marriage and family. Other letters he has written confirm this (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, 1 Tim. 3:4). Rather, he is likely talking about becoming entangled in the desire to become wealthy (1 Timothy 6:9-10) or gain the status symbols that are associated with “getting ahead” in this life. These are the affairs that most people occupy themselves with as they pursue this life, and it is these that we must separate ourselves from if we are to accomplish Yahweh’s objectives. We must live. But we should not pursue this life as the normal person does. We should live it with eternity in mind not this life in mind. To be active in terms of making a good life for us on this earth is to be inactive in terms of our Lord. There is no blending of these two agendas, any more than a soldier at war can run a farm.

In the process of serving Him, some are blessed by God with the things of this world. We should not be judgmental toward them, nor envious. We must be careful not to make such blessings our goal and objective, or it will soon not be the Lord’s work we are doing.

2:5—And also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules.

Live with care! That is what Paul is getting at in these figures of the soldier, the athlete and next, the farmer. Live intentionally with the end in view. Make solid choices about what to give yourself to, because there are consequences and implications that come with every decision. The shame and heartache of an athlete being disqualified because of a rule violation is not a storyline exclusive to the modern Olympic era. It was an occurrence familiar to those of Paul’s times, millennia prior to the performance-enhancing drug scandals that have plagued the Olympic games of the past several decades. It is a particularly awful and demeaning thing to be found guilty of gaining an unfair competitive advantage through some violation of rules, and to be denied participation or be stripped of a prize won. It provides a great illustration of the greater shame and eternal tragedy that can overtake a spiritual leader who does not lead himself well, who allows himself to indulge his own fleshly desires and so is overtaken by various sins.

To not lead oneself in grasping God's grace for the moment parallels the athlete not competing according to the rules. It is, in fact, to run a completely different race. It is to create a favorable image and even bring about a certain appearance of success, only to have the One who sees all things disqualify us from the prize. It is to face those who have supported us and must admit that what we appeared to be is not in fact what we are. It is a most agonizing experience for all concerned. It is also completely avoidable.

Though this illustration compares such character flaws to violations of rules, they are also violations of grace. God has given Himself to transform such weakness in us. To fall victim to them and to have our lives shaped by them is to not reach out and take what He has freely and clearly offered to us. It is to deny and circumvent the process that His Spirit is trying to orchestrate in our lives. It is to bear a yoke that is not His design that we should ever bear. It is also the hard and harsh reality that His Law has brought to light, and that millions have never escaped. The fact is that apart from Yahweh's work in us we cannot run the race according to the rules. We must cast ourselves by faith on His promises to run well.

2:6—The hard working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crop.

Having compared the challenge of leading oneself to the challenge of being a soldier and an athlete, Paul now turns to the farmer to provide a third illustration. Rather than being disqualified, it is God's design that by our diligence and persistence in grasping His grace for each moment, we enjoy the fruit produced by Him through us. Just as the farmer enjoys the moment in the field of sampling the crop produced by his labor, so God's desire is that we savor the fruit that our faithfulness allows Him to produce in and through us. There should be those moments of quite gratitude and pleasure when we enjoy the victories and experience the satisfaction of our obedience, when the joy of the partnership is driven home to us by some experience with Him.

But the "share of the crop" we receive is not only this moment of joy we may or may not savor. This is only secondary. The share off the crop that we receive, we receive first. The presence of that word is important, as a statement of time. There is a present and future aspect to this reception of "our share." Any ministry of the Spirit we carry on first does its work in us. We are the first to grow, if we are doing it right. We then bring about that growth in others. We are the first to be blest, then we bring blessing to others. We enjoy the ministry of the Holy Spirit first, then we take it to others.

This is a critical order in ministry and it is quite freeing. We take to others what God has blessed us with and it will minister to the need of the moment. The "fit" will be precise and miraculous. Ministry is simply the product of an obedient life. We are asked to pass along to others that which God is doing to us. So there is the present aspect to our being "first" to receive our "share of the crop."

There is a future aspect as well. When we enter the realm of God's eternal kingdom, when it becomes visible on earth at the start of the 1,000-year reign of Christ, and then again when it is established forever on the new earth, the faithful will receive their appropriate inheritance, that which God gives them by His grace as a reward for their faithfulness, and they will receive it first. In the sense this verse is dealing with, ministry is not at all a sacrificial undertaking. What we have given up and set aside we are more than compensated for. We exchange what cannot be kept for that which cannot be lost.

The spiritual leader walks the course of the journey first. This equips and energizes him to take others along with him.

Of the three figures used here to illustrate the work of such a leader, two involve reward. All involve an investment of one's lifeblood. All illustrate in their own way conscious and persistent effort. But it is neither thankless nor fruitless work that God has called us to, nor does it really deal with intangibles. It is a work we feel and experience moment by moment in the depths of our being, first.

2:7—Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

The overall content of the letter he is writing to Timothy is what Paul has in view for him to "consider." The word rendered "consider" (νοεῖ, present active imperative second person singular), communicates a command that has to do with the application of the mental processes to an issue or problem. It refers to the process of developing a proper perception of something, of pondering its realities.

Paul is saying, "Think through this stuff!" He is asserting to Timothy that this was not merely a normal letter between friends. There was that within this letter that was and is foundational, a written record of thoughts and ideas of the Lord Himself. The words will, when reflected on and grasped, have application to every area of life and ministry, even the complex issues for which there is no pat answer. These words will help reveal to Timothy God's will in everything.

This develops a bit further the idea that was summed up in 2:1, when Paul told Timothy to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." That is the key thought that the rest of the book develops. It is that there is provision by Christ Jesus in each moment for that moment. From this verse we see that a key part of that provision made by Jesus is God's written word, and it plays a key role in Spiritual living. Paul will make some very profound statements about it later in His words to Timothy.

We can now state a very significant idea in this message of Paul to Timothy. In our language it is this: "Be bold in grabbing hold of what you think Christ is leading in the moment, confirming it by the standard of written revelation, and then doing it!"

2:8—Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel,

It is our most common mistake in ministry to forget Jesus Christ. We remember deadlines and we implement process to remember and cover the detail of the tasks of ministry, but we forget Jesus Christ. We forget the relationship with Him, becoming caught up in the doing. We become busy Christians, but not worshipping Christians who are still in close touch with Jesus. We do, in fact, tend to forget the Head, the One who is supposed to be doing all the thinking! Then as we neglect that relationship, we soon function apart from his resurrection power, and we soon live for the present day instead of for the time he will reign.

These two facts, Christ's resurrection and Christ being the heir to David's throne, were central to Paul's gospel. Stripped of these, the gospel is not good news. Both facts are forward looking with great implication in terms of the shaping of the present. They are not just important theological foundation stones, though it would be impossible to over-state their doctrinal importance. They are important in terms of everyday life. They make a church a legitimate church in terms of its statement of faith, and they make it a healthy church in terms of its day-to-day work in the mission.

The first fact, that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, means He was who He said He was, and His words were the words of God. It means He was the appointed sin-bearer, the giver of spiritual life to all who would believe in Him. The resurrection was the unmistakable sign that Jesus designated as that which authenticated His life and words (Matthew 12:38-45, 16:1-4). By virtue of a sinless life, He broke the power of death, both physical and spiritual death. The resurrection proves He was no ordinary man. He was God in human flesh.

But He was fully man, the descendant of David by human reckoning. This designation affirms that He rightly fits and fulfills all the promises made in the Old Testament regarding a ruler, i.e., Isaiah 9:1-7. So, in keeping with those promises, His kingdom will come, it will fill the present earth. It will be a kingdom that will never end. He is the Savior of the race, the man who perfectly lived the law and so will restore man's designated role as ruler of God's creation.

Remember Jesus Christ. It will change how you look at everything.

2:9—for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned.

Paul suffered hardship for this Jesus, the actual historic person, the one about whom the previous facts are true. The hardship he suffered was unjust, the result of warped thinking. He was viewed as a criminal for embracing and teaching Jesus of Nazareth, even as that Jesus had been viewed as a criminal.

When Paul says that the word of God is not imprisoned, he makes a statement that is loaded with meaning. By the word of God, Paul meant all that had become and would yet become Scripture, along with all that God had ever spoken and decreed apart from our knowledge. This Word of God cannot be thwarted by any of man's rebellion or by the Devil's schemes. God speaks and it is done. We must always believe and embrace that idea, especially when suffering for Him. It is that grand purpose and cause for which we aim and strive. Wrong will be made right, and truth will obliterate all that is a lie, because the word of God cannot be successfully resisted.

2:10—For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory.

Because the Word of God cannot be thwarted or in any way influenced or controlled, Paul endured all things. He did so with people in mind, millions of them, who needed to be given the truth before it was too late. He did it for the rich and the poor who in their unique ways are blinded to the truth. He did it because he knew that among all types of people were those marked out and chosen by God, in whom God was working, who would respond once they heard the truth.

These millions, by responding and acknowledging the truth, would receive two things, salvation and eternal glory. We have come to view both in a narrow sense. Salvation to us means to be saved from the penalty of sin, specifically from hell. Eternal glory has come to mean going to heaven. Paul and other writers of Scripture likely viewed both things in a much broader sense.

Salvation to them was both an event and a process. It meant to be rescued instantly from the penalty of sin. It meant to be rescued from the power of sin over the process of time as obedience was learned. And it meant to be rescued eventually, in God's time, from the very presence of sin. Salvation was thus a package deal. It was both an event and a process. Likewise, eternal glory meant not only being physically in heaven, but receiving a full reward from God, having been faithful to the end.

So what Paul is saying here is that he endures hardship so that the children of God might mature in their obedience and be faithful in their moment by moment walk with Christ to enter the full reward that can be theirs for eternity. Christ's sufferings had led to the justification of those who believed. Paul's sufferings would lead to the sanctification of many who would believe (Col 1:24ff). That is the pattern we should all seek to find our place in, suffering with Christ to complete the work He started.

The following verses relate to not just being "saved" in the sense we use the term, of what Paul called justification. They relate to the whole of the salvation experience as provided and planned by God resulting in our justification, sanctification, and glorification. These are successive stages in the salvation experience that God seeks to take us through, each building on the previous one. Together these aspects of God's gracious salvation aim at producing faithfulness in this life and eternal reward in the next.

2:11—It is a trustworthy statement: 'For if we died with Him we shall also live with Him;'

Most speculate that these are the words of a song sung in the early church, which may have had its roots in a Hebrew poem/prayer of the Old Testament era. It was familiar enough to Timothy, whose mother was Jewish but whose father was Greek, that Paul could point to it as an example of sound thinking. It is intended to be a statement that describes the entire salvation experience, in the broad sense depicted in the previous verse.

We create contradictions between what this verse teaches about salvation, and the testimony of the rest of Scripture when we suppose that these verses are dealing with our justification. The words of this song are speaking about the entire "Christian" experience. They are speaking of our justification—brought about by our faith. They are speaking also of our sanctification—brought about by our faithfulness to the way of faith. They are speaking also of our glorification—our destiny as a result of our faith and our reward for our faithfulness. That whole experience, salvation in all its dimensions, is what these lines relate to.

The first line of the song, which literally translated says, “If we died together, we will live together,” relates to our being placed “in Him” through belief, and so experiencing His death. Paul spoke of this spiritual reality that can be somewhat difficult for our time-bound minds to envision, in Romans 6. The term “died,” is an aorist indicative, and Paul is viewing this action as having been completed. When we believed we died. The old us, the one who was hopelessly enslaved by sin with no hope of anything else or of ever rising higher, died the moment we believed. That person no longer exists. In terms of how God views us, the penalty of our sin has been paid through the death of Christ and so what we were died when Jesus died. The result is that we live with Him, no longer separated from God as every man since Adam has experienced, due to sin.

Spiritual death for us has been cancelled by Jesus’ death and that old spiritually dead person is gone. We are now spiritually alive and so cannot be separated from God, ever! As a result, physical death no longer has dominion over us. We will experience it, but it cannot separate us from God. Paul’s words here are true of death in either the physical or spiritual sense. If we have died physically in union with Christ, we will live physically in union with Him. It is as this song states. The words are “trustworthy.”

2:12—‘If we endure, we shall also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us;’

It is helpful to recall that the words to this song were introduced by Paul into this letter as a part of his thought that he endured all things for the sake of God’s chosen ones. His objective in enduring was that through his efforts those chosen ones could obtain the salvation that is in Christ and along with that salvation, eternal glory (verse 10). Now, it is possible to view that statement as meaning that eternal glory is received now one is justified, or what we call “saved.” But we have already said that the Bible writers used the term salvation in a much wider sense, to speak of both the justification experience and the sanctification process.

Paul is stating that this song is a trustworthy statement about the truth that governs our salvation from both the penalty and the power of sin. If we endure, that is, if we persist in being faithful to the truth, and embrace the work of the Holy Spirit as it is carried out in us, we will be rewarded by our Lord with position in His kingdom in both His reign on this earth and His reign on the new earth (Luke 19:11-27). If we endure, we will also reign with Him. The condition for justification is faith. The condition for reigning with Him is endurance. It is important to note that this endurance on our part is a work of faith. It is a result of God’s grace. But when we choose to obey the Holy Spirit, it becomes our work as well. He deserves credit in the full sense, but we also receive reward because it is possible for us to be unfaithful and not to endure. Because of this human choice, God rewards those who make the choice and endure, even though the “work” is still properly viewed as a work of His grace.

Now if we do not endure, if we deny the voice of the Holy Spirit in us and we ignore the conviction of the truth that He brings about, if we live life doing those things that satisfy our own desire and that meet our own agenda, He will deny us privilege in His kingdom. We will still be part of it, we will still belong to Him, but we will have missed the blessing that comes to those who respond moment by moment to His work of grace in “saving” us daily from the power of sin. We will have lived in its grasp and so not have endured, and we will be denied privilege in His kingdom. He will say “no” to us in terms of certain privileges.

There is another sense in which He will deny us. If we deny Him access to the details of our personal lives, He will deny us fellowship with Him. We will be denied access to the joy, the peace, and other blessings that He routinely bestows on obedient children. God could not be just and do anything else but reward the varied responses to His grace that occur among His children.

To summarize, it can be easily maintained that these lines in the song touch on two aspects of the salvation experiences, and therefore two senses in which Yahweh might deny us. They are speaking about our response to God's efforts to save us from the daily experience of sin and the resulting separation from Him. If we deny Him in terms of our moment-by-moment decisions, He will deny us the blessing associated with what His direction brings about. These words are also speaking about God's efforts to save us from missing out on eternal investment, the opportunity of building up treasure to be inherited in heaven. If we deny Him in terms of the practical course of our actions, He will deny us the privilege of entering the rewards He will graciously bestow on the faithful.

This song then called those who sang it to walk the road daily, not to be content with the first steps, but to pursue the journey to arrive at all God wants them to become. The next line confirms that our eternal reward is what is at stake in our faithfulness, not our justification.

2:13—If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself.

The ability to live the Christian life is, in the final analysis, a matter of exercising faith. It is trusting that what God has said about things is the truth and it is making life decisions on that basis. There are those Christians, whose faith limits their everyday response to the truth. (All of us, in fact, have countless lapses of faith each day). They are unable to trust God in some deeply personal issues, which makes them unwilling to submit to His order of things in various areas of personal conduct. They not only have lapses, but can rightly be termed "faithless," habitually not exercising faith.

The term Paul uses, rendered in the NASB "faithless," makes a powerful statement about their lives. Literally, it means unbelieving. From a human point of view, they deserve being rejected by Him, because of this habitual inability to trust God. In the face of the unbelief of His people, God remains faithful to them because they are a part of Him. He has entered covenant relationship to them.

And so this song does two things. It affirms the importance of obeying God faithfully because the reward is a glorious one that lasts through eternity. We are to diligently see that His work in us to make us holy and conform us to the character of His Son is not blocked or in any way thwarted by us. At the same time it affirms that our failures do not threaten our position in His family. They do not cancel the covenant. We belong to Him and He remains faithful even when we are not. This is a trustworthy statement of how our relationship to Him works.

2:14—Remind them of these things and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless, and leads to the ruin of the hearers.

“Word-wrangling” is a favorite pastime of people. We replay things people have said over and over in our minds, and soon the words have a different meaning than the one who spoke to them intended. We camp on various words that may or may not be significant to the one who spoke to them and argue about them at the expense of the overall message. Paul warns Timothy that in a church, people need to be kept from doing this. Such activity is useless he says. By this he means that it does not advance the mission, it creates other missions and agendas. Ultimately those who hear such wranglings become useless themselves to the mission.

Instead of allowing bickering and fighting within the Church and discussion of peripheral issues, Timothy was to remind them of “these things.” The phrase “these things” likely refers to all that Paul will write in this letter. He regarded what he was writing as the practical essentials of personal life. These were the things that fueled the mission. It is also likely that the “these things” that would keep the mission on course included all he had taught Timothy over the years. This letter stated some of those things but represented all what Paul taught. He was referring to a systematic theology and a practical manual of Christian living and church procedure that he had passed along to Timothy over the years and entrusted to his care (see 1:13-14).

2:15—Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.

Many have made the mistake of taking the instruction of the previous verse, not to wrangle about words, to mean that Christians should not get involved in discussing intricate detail of theology and doctrine. That is a great error. We are not to wrangle over mere human words or get caught up in wars of words. That is the force of verse 14 when viewed in conjunction with verse 15. We are to give ourselves to understanding the detail of Scripture. Of course, we are not to do so in a mean-spirited way or draw lines where Scripture does not. But we are to be diligent in coming to a precise understanding of the words of Scripture. The words of this verse speak quite specifically to this.

Spiritual leaders are here compared to craftsmen, those who build from raw material things that will be useful and purposeful. The difficulty of being a spiritual craftsman is that the product has a mind of its own! But in this verse the product is not the thing Paul is charging Timothy with, it is the process. He is telling him to make sure he uses the tools well. In the final analysis that is what the spiritual leader can and must do and in most cases that will bring about a fine result. So Paul tells Timothy to be diligent in the handling of truth. Don’t assume you will handle it accurately. Don’t just pass along the first thought that comes to mind. Analyze, critique, listen to other great minds, do all the things that will help assure thoroughness and accuracy.

Paul wants Timothy to be diligent in this because each man will “present himself” one day to God. In speaking of this Paul is referring to the time when each Christian stands at the judgment seat of Christ. There, his work will be examined. This will include the work he has allowed God to do in him and the work he has accomplished in others through the power of the Holy Spirit working in him. It is this approval we must seek, not the approval of others along the journey. Just as we believe that our earthly work makes a statement about us to other people, so we are to be concerned with the fact that how we handle the truth makes a statement about us to God. It reveals our heart.

It has been popular to see this verse as impetus for more learning and education regarding the handling of the text of Scripture. That is a good start. It is impossible to overstate the importance of right interpretation. The truth cannot be correctly applied until it is rightly understood. We must remember that the Holy Spirit's role is not to help us discern what the words meant to the original hearer. That is a matter of grammar, logic, and history. Meaning is arrived at by using one's developing exegetical skills. It is not that we are on our own in this, but like any skill or art, it is one that develops with use and with the development of supporting skills, all of which are pursued hopefully with the direction of the Holy Spirit.

But as an example, the Holy Spirit will not give us insight into the meaning of the original languages if we have never studied them. He works in the process of our own thinking, giving us greater acuity in the skills we have cultivated and developed. We cannot by the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives alone be skilled at Bible interpretation. He does not enable us to skip the hard work of the classroom.

By the same token however, many is the sermon preached without the impetus of the Holy Spirit. We must remember that accurately handling the truth goes beyond interpretation of Scripture. It demands that we respond to it with humble, teachable hearts and accept the Holy Spirit's application of it to our daily lives.

Any spiritual leader must be certain this application process is going on in his own life continually, or he is not handling accurately the word of truth. The word rendered "handling accurately" is *ορθοτομουντα*, the root of which has given us words like orthodox and orthodontist. It describes straightness. We are not to bend the truth to our own liking. There must be accuracy in its interpretation, and straight-forwardness in its application. We must study the meaning of its words, then listen to the Holy Spirit's voice in applying them first to ourselves and then to our hearers. This we are to be diligent about.

What is at stake in this matter is our eternal reward. There is great opportunity in teaching others for commendation from Christ. Our salvation is not at stake, but our inheritance is. We must be diligent in seeking the commendation of Christ and not get satisfied along the way with the commendation of man, for while the opportunity for reward is great for teachers, the standard of judgment by which they are scrutinized will be stricter (James 3:1). So we must handle the truth with great care and with greatest diligence.

We must avoid the error of poor interpretation and the sterility of poor application. In the former case, the hard work of study was missing. In the latter case the hard work of prayer and meditation is missing, so that His message for the moment, which is what good application is, is never arrived at. We must do both tasks well. Our teaching may be sound doctrinally, it may be well put together homiletically, but when there is no sense that it is a word from the Lord it has at best only the power of a good political speech. All of this is involved in handling the word of truth accurately. It is the heart and soul of spiritual leadership to do this diligently, because the word of truth is our primary tool for leadership and ministry.

2:16—But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness.

We are to pursue diligently the accurate handling of the word of truth. We are to avoid simply speaking for the sake of speaking. This includes everything from unguarded conversation to public statements made for selfish purposes to sermons given that are not Spirit-directed. Any speech that is not under the control of the Holy Spirit is empty and godless in the final analysis. It is only a matter of degree.

Self-indulgence, what the Bible calls fleshliness, is the ultimate end of all that is endeavored apart from the Holy Spirit. Speech that is not Spirit controlled, no matter how high sounding, promotes fleshliness. The corruption of such speech does its work first in those that speak and from them it spreads to others, as the next verse will say. That is the nature of fleshliness. It always grows and spreads, getting worse the more it is indulged in. The one whose patterns of speech are fleshly becomes more indulgent the more they speak. Their words become less controlled, less pious, more brazen, more presumptuous, more aimed at self-exaltation. The hearers travel the same path as the speaker, unless in wisdom they recognize the source and as this verse exhorts, avoid the “chatter.”

This is powerful and strategic advice for all but is of particular use to the young who desire to set a course for their own development. One of the most strategic things a growing Christian can do is make a commitment to talk less and hear more.

2:17—and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus,

Talk that is not of the Spirit always spreads destruction. Unfortunately, it can spread much faster than the truth. Paul compares its spread to gangrene, which can infect a limb and spread to the whole body if the limb is not amputated. He names two individuals as examples of this danger. It would be an awful thing to have one's name in the Scripture as an example of evil. But such is the unfortunate and self-inflicted legacy of Hymenaeus and Philetus. Like a limb infected with gangrene, the only way to arrest damage caused by such people is to separate them from the body. It is a most difficult prospect for spiritual leaders to ponder when they must decisively deal with such individuals whom they do care for. They must do so for the good of the others whom they care for as well. They must inflict pain and bring about loss, there is no other way to amputate a limb. It is a particularly reviling responsibility for those charged with it, but one they must be faithful in carrying out. The specific issues of these two individuals are noted in the next verse.

2:18—Men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and thus they upset the faith of some.

Paul has moved from the general, the need to handle truth accurately and to avoid empty chatter, to a specific situation, wrong teaching about the timing of the resurrection. He has given the principle and then applied it. We do not know the detail of the doctrinal scheme of these two men. It likely involved an early form of Gnosticism. In its mainstream this system of thought denied a bodily resurrection, saying that the only resurrection we would experience would be that of our spirits. In adapting Gnosticism to Christianity these men had apparently come up with the idea that the resurrection had already taken place. To say that the resurrection has already taken place would do great violence to everything embraced by Christian theology, from eschatology to hermeneutics. Such departure from sound words upsets the faith of people rather than strengthening them. It is not simply a matter of upsetting people rather than strengthening them. People get over being upset. The damaging thing is that the faith of people is being thrown into turmoil, and their faith must be healthy for them to lead the life God wants them to leave. Faith, the habit of trusting God and His word, fuels the right kind of behavior. Destroy faith and you will destroy that life, though not necessarily its trappings. You are left with something that is at least as damaging as atheism and perhaps more. You have the shell of Christianity without the life. We must preserve the practice of faith for the faith to be healthy. That is why firm action toward such men reflects love of the most noble sort.

2:19—Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and ‘Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness.’

Over the centuries of time there have been myriads of men and movements that have not handled the word of truth accurately. Men have arisen from within the ranks of Christianity and in many cases risen to high position and corrupted the whole movement in their day. Yet the movement has always returned with the essential truths intact. It is a remarkable miracle. To this movement that will not die and that cannot be snuffed out there is a foundation. We know that in the final analysis it is a person, the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ, and His Father, God, that are the Church’s sure foundation. But Paul says that foundation has a seal. By saying this he is saying that there is that about it that gives it enduring authority. Because the real Church is invisible its foundation is also invisible. But the invisible entity has persistently been manifested and has consistently returned to its true form because of two principles. Together they explain its preservation. Like seals that guarantee authenticity and that protect against tampering, these principles guarantee that God will always have a people on this earth that compose His true Church. The gates of hell will not prevail against it.

The first principle is that God knows those who are really members of His church. Others may fool us, but God knows. Satan may for a time be able to mislead God's sheep, but in the end, God knows them in the sense that they are intimately connected to Him. They will hear His voice, they will hear it above the other voices, and they will follow. That is not to say that everyone will follow, but that there will be a flock that will follow. Literally, "the Lord has known" (aorist tense). The action is being viewed as an accomplished fact, as our relationship is frequently portrayed in Scripture. The opponents rise and fall, the false doctrines and the "doctrinal flavors" that tend to be the fads of various generations repeat themselves. But the Lord knows those who are His, and He has set His very presence within them. There is this essential identity always present on the earth.

The second principle is worded by Paul in the form of the command that has always echoed through any movement that God is present in. That principle is that God's people have always been led and are always being led to separate themselves from evil deeds. That is the essence of the pilgrimage that God is leading us on. It is theologically known as "sanctification." It is God calling us personally to holiness and everyone who is walking with God is walking this path because He is on the path of perfect holiness. So there is present in God this innate call to holiness. It is being obeyed by those in touch with God. When living above reproach wanes in significance, we can be certain that something has been lost in terms of the individual's and movement's connection to God. These two principles then assure that God's Church will always have a presence and will outlive the various counterfeits that come and go. The first is a principle that we can simply have faith in. We need not get anxious or begin to believe that "I alone am left" (1 Kings 19). The second is a principle by which we can spot that movement of God's Spirit and be a part of it. It is the quest that unites us and the passion to which we all return, the call to holiness of life. These things explain the resiliency of the movement of God. To paraphrase the words of a song writer, the Church may be forced underground for a period, but it bursts forth purer and cleaner because God will always have a people following His call to holiness and he will always be with them.

2 Timothy 2:20—Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor.

Paul uses a figure of speech to illustrate to his readers that within the family of God there is an honorable way to live and a dishonorable way to live. He draws a parallel between various "vessels" in a home and the various people in God's family. In a home there are the fine goblets, reserved for special occasions of celebration, which give the home a certain elegance and dignity. There are also the wastebaskets. The drinking glasses and the commode have this in common, they both hold water, but their uses are vastly different! This is the contrast Paul is trying to establish in this verse. There are different people within the kingdom of God. Some of them give themselves to agendas that are less than noble and honorable. However, this is a consequence of their choices. It is not, as in the home, a matter of design. The next verse will show that our choices and our level of diligence in matters of faith impact what we become in terms of our use in God's family.

2:21—Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.

In verse 17 two individuals were named, Hymenaeus and Philetus, who were upsetting the faith of people rather than building it up. The present verse shows how a person comes to be such a person, one who harms rather than one who strengthens and build up. It comes down to the work of leading oneself that must be done faithfully. Certain things we must not tolerate in our lives, or they will bear fruit in us that is not noble. There is the conscious, deliberate, and intentional work each person must do of separating themselves from the things human beings naturally drift into. Paul has mentioned some of them quite directly, others are inferred. He has mentioned the danger of going astray from the truth (2:18), of empty chatter (2:16), of wrangling about words (2:14). Earlier in the chapter he has urged hard work, integrity, single-mindedness as virtues to pursue. The inference is that slothfulness, moral ambiguity and a lack of focus should be chased away. So the “these things” of this verse likely include the specific things Paul has mentioned, but also a broader family of issues that tend to come with them. They are characteristic of those not pursuing the character of Christ.

Paul mentions four things that are at stake in our choices in these matters. The four things are our honor, our sanctification, our usefulness to God, and our preparedness for the work of God. Our salvation from the penalty of sin is done, accomplished through Christ on the cross. Our salvation from the power of sin in our lives is ongoing and its progress is determined by choices we make. When we choose as Paul is directing, immense power from God becomes available to us. When we allow ourselves to drift on such matters, our progress lags and we become lethargic. If we continue in such lethargy, we soon become resistant to what the Spirit is doing instead of being an instrument for His use. At that point we are no longer a vessel for honor. We have allowed ourselves to be a mixed bag spiritually rather than sanctified. We are not particularly useful to God but are of use to the enemy. We have not risen to the work of the kingdom, so we do not rise to it. We have arrived at a point where we have hurt and damaged ourselves. A little at a time we have embraced a life that likely we are not remotely content with.

2:22—Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

There are fleshly desires that go with being young that wisdom should lead us to leave behind. Tragically we do not run from them. The attraction of these things does not automatically leave with the passing years. In fact, it is the normal and accepted practice in Western culture to spend one’s entire lifetime pursuing youthful lusts. We are not told to let go of our youth, but to hang on to it. If by that we meant that we should stay active, have a youthful exuberance, be optimistic, it would be a good message. But in that we mean sensory experiences, the various romantic pursuits of youth, and even the naïve idealism, we are fools. In our culture we worship youth. We do all we can to hang on to its experiences and its emotions and its approach to life. Then we are amazed that relationships fail, that businesses collapse, that fortunes are squandered, that personal debt has sky-rocketed, that billions are spent on entertainment and that children are raising themselves. The desire for a certain image, a certain status, a certain look, for unrestrained freedom, even the unmitigated pursuit of love and romance, should be things we gain a wise and seasoned outlook toward. Maturity should enable us to have the right perspective on these things and a peace about our level of attainment with respect to them.

As the years pass the impetuous urgings of youth should be replaced by a growing understanding of who God has made us to be and what sphere of influence we are to have. Instead, we lust. Our lusting can even take on spiritual trappings so that we pursue the things of the Spirit with all sorts of mixed motives (Acts 8:18-23, James 4:1-10). We are easily deceived by our own doublemindedness. Such quests are wisely set aside for the pursuit of righteousness, faith, love and peace. We are to admire these virtues and desire to make them ours. We are to approach our character as we would our financial portfolio and seek to lay hold of these treasures, to grow in them and amass them as time passes. Youth wants to be right, maturity says to be righteous, to have “rightness” describe our every thought and decision. Maturity in Christ is maturity in living by faith. It is to trust Him and His word on things absolutely. It is to not fall apart in crisis. It is to not cast aside character when one’s way is blocked. It is to do things His way when the whole world screams at us to do it their way. Growing up involves growing in love. It means to demand less and give more with the passing years. Love means to enforce your will less and give way to His will more. Love wears many faces. At times it means to employ grace and mercy rather than judgment. At other times love means to speak the truth plainly but with concern for selling others on it, not just in verbal revenge. Maturity in Christ is also maturity in peace. It is understanding the value of both inner and outer peace and valuing it above what can be gained by forfeiting it. It is not a matter of pursuing peace at all costs, but it is a solid and sober understanding of all that is lost when peace is cast aside. It is a reluctance to fight, to brood, to worry, all the things that rob us of inner peace and relational peace. All of these are the values of the redeemed, because they are the heart of God for His family. He puts these things in us through the Holy Spirit and to pursue their opposites is most often to enter a tug-of-war with Him. Paul gives Timothy one other pointer about this godly pursuit. Do it with others, “those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.” These will be on the same journey, and you can strengthen and supply each other as you go. This is not a journey to be entered into alone. The truth is that we do not “solo” on this journey. It is one designed to be accomplished only in company with others. It can be lived no other way.

2:23—But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels.

Part of youthfulness is getting caught up in debate. There is a fleshly satisfaction that comes with prevailing and winning. That is the problem. Now there are debates that must be had, but maturity demands that we choose our battles very carefully. There are those subjects both inside Christianity and outside, for which there is simply not revelation. There is no way of establishing a “final word.” There are other subjects that cannot be successfully discussed with certain people, because of those people’s ignorance and foolishness. The lack of revelation, either due to its absence or the absence of a desire to understand it, brings about speculation. Speculation is an equal opportunity employer and a great equalizer and so will produce disagreement more than it will produce consensus. It is a wise person who knows when to leave something alone. When a leader leaves something alone, his followers likely will do the same and the movement will continue and not get distracted or bogged down. Speculating is an activity the flesh loves, because it can create the illusion of wisdom and bring about all the admiration and status that wisdom accords. It is a trap that spiritual leaders learn to steer clear of.

2:24—And the Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged.

These qualities are the outward manifestation of the inner values being pursued. One who is pursuing righteousness, faith, love, and peace, with other godly people, is not quarrelsome. They are kind to all, able or enabled by their positive disposition and example, to teach, and they are calculated in their response to personal injury. These are the marks of the Lord’s bond servant, and being His bond servant brings these about. As we learn to serve at His beckoning and to do those things, He summons us to do in His way, this is the result. The one who becomes quarrelsome, who abandons kindness, who forfeits ability to teach the truth about the moment, who seeks retribution when wronged, can clearly be identified as one who has left the light of fellowship with God. They are not doing what the light of truth shining on the situation would reveal as God’s desire and heart. At that point they are no longer the Lord’s bond servant. They are serving themselves. They are living in darkness and have not come to “know Him” in that matter. He who abandons the quarrel before it breaks out is walking with God (Proverbs 17:14, 20:3). Even in entering a legitimate fight, and there are battles that must be fought, we must not be quarrelsome.

2:25—With gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God will grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.

There is always opposition to spiritual leaders. This is because the truth by its very nature makes demands on people. Because we do not innately have the truth, its entry into our lives casts our actions in a new light. Our choice is to change our actions, or change the truth, but our nature is to harmonize this inner conflict one way or the other. To bend the standard of truth brings us into conflict with others. Either way there is likely conflict in store once truth enters the picture. As light reveals direction, so truth reveals a proper course. That means change and change produces conflict. So a spiritual leader is constantly managing conflict. The rule for correcting people is gentleness. We cannot abandon correcting. It is the essence of ministry. But it must be done gently, or it will repel rather than attract. We must bide time in a sense, hoping for the grace of God which enables the person to change their minds and learn, then set a different course. Repentance, the changing of one’s mind, is a gift from God. That is why we should never fight it. It is a gift and privilege we should eagerly and quickly grab hold of and use. But it is from God, and we must be very careful not to so aggressively hammer the truth that people run from its pain and sorrow and so lose the hope of its eventual peace and comfort. These come with repentance but can be missed by the weak, wounded, and damaged because aggression causes them to run in fear and self-preservation. We must gently correct those who oppose. The battle is difficult enough without inciting more fleshly mechanisms. We significantly up the ante when we abandon gentleness as we handle the truth. The plight of those who oppose the truth is far too serious, as the next verse will show, to simply administer “blows of truth” to them.

2:26—and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

Four factors are mentioned in verses 24-26 regarding bringing those who oppose the truth into right thinking regarding it. One of them is mentioned in verses 24-25 where the approach of God's people is spoken of. How they are approached is a factor in the conversion of the disobedient. In verse 25 a second factor comes into play in the person of God. He does a work that brings about their repentance, and their repentance is said to be something He grants. In the present verse, verse 26, the person themselves and their own thought processes play a role. Here they are said to need to "come to their senses." The truth does make sense and since it is the truth it makes sense to obey it and live considering it rather than denying it. The term rendered "come to their senses" is *ἀνανηψωσιν*. It is from two words, the preposition *ἀνα* which means "up" or "again," and *νηψω*, meaning to abstain from wine or to be sober. We would say "to sober up," or "to return to sobriety." It is powerful imagery. The person who rejects truth is portrayed by this as being impaired. Their own thinking, they must drag into line with the truth. God does a work, but it is one done in their mind and heart so that they play a definite role. Though God grants repentance, and is rightly portrayed as its author, the individual's will become active in the process so that they really do change their minds. The fourth factor involved in the matter of the condition of those who oppose the truth is the devil. He, in various ways, ensnares people so that the decision to repent becomes complex for them and the factors against repenting become, in their minds, insurmountable. They may be intellectual actors, emotional ones, financial ones, relational ones, social ones. He has many things he can manipulate in individual cases to keep people from repentance, and this is why God Himself must intervene and grant repentance. It is impossible for humanity to match wits with Satan and prevail. It is a major factor in repentance but one that God has made complete provision for so that it is not an excuse. A final thought that is important to recognize in this verse: people who deny the truth are not morally neutral. They are held captive by the evil one and are so held by him for the express reason of performing his will. They become agents of his purposes. Their sinfulness and fleshliness may be of the "respectable" sort, but it is still evil and is evil of the most dangerous sort.

2 TIMOTHY 3

3:1—But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come.

There is something we need to know, and we need to embrace its realities. It is a feature of “the last days.” Now the last days are not necessarily the times that we refer to as “the tribulation,” nor are they necessarily the days leading immediately up to the tribulation. Rather, they are the “last days” when compared to the “former days,” the times after Christ as opposed to the times before Christ. In our terms we could refer to them as the “AD days.” Difficult times would come as part of this period of history according to Paul’s testimony. Jesus described the wars and rumors of wars that would characterize this period as just the beginning of the birth pangs that would result in the advent of the kingdom of God (Matthew 24:4-8). We should not be alarmed or surprised by these things. We should not leap to the conclusion that particularly bad events have any prophetic significance except this, that they are more in a long line of “difficult times.” We should know the nature of our times well. They will bring difficulty, and history has proven Paul’s words to be true, from the black plague to two world wars, to the complexity of problems that plague the various cultures, we have lived in difficult times. But the events are not the cause of the difficulty, as Paul will clearly show in the verses that follow. The events are symptomatic.

3:2—For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy,

The problem on earth is not caused by a series of random events. The problems and difficulties of any age start and are sustained by the faulty moral makeup of humankind. Men are inclined to evil and choose it rather than good, and then societies and whole cultures become corrupt. Paul mentions 19 things that will increasingly become characteristic of men and women and these produce consequences in society that make the days difficult, especially so for people of faith. Each of the 19 things is significant and can be easily and abundantly illustrated. Each has been noticed in every generation, but there seems to be an increase in the intensity of each of these character flaws, and a growing acceptability of them rather than proper outrage. Each passing generation has successively bemoaned the deterioration in the moral fiber of their offspring and the growing disregard for the “old ways.” Some of this is selective memory, but it is apparent from the statements of the prophets of Scripture that there would be a downward moral trend among humanity as they lived out their years on planet earth. Paul’s first statement is that men would be lovers of self. This has been characteristic of humanity since Adam, but Paul was talking about it showing itself more clearly and extensively. The pursuit of self-gratification has at times been carefully and meticulously disguised, knowing that all would see it for what it is, as a lack of character and virtue.

Today it is shamelessly embraced and commended. That is not to say we do not have our moments of altruism and selflessness. But we have arrived at days when we are moving beyond narcissism and into self-deification. We have become a culture of people who demand and for the most part get what we want. We are a society of entitlement. Our love for self is equaled only by our love for money, the next thing on Paul's list. There has never been a time when men did not love things and crave more. But our addiction has grown with the increasing dosages of "stuff" that our times have enabled us to experience. We are becoming increasingly dependent on what we own, but increasingly unfulfilled by it. And so, we pursue more of it. If men were lovers of money in Paul's time, what have they become since? The craving for goods fueled much more than the industrial revolution. It has fueled an evolution in man and has indeed been the root of all sorts of evil (1 Timothy 6:10). Paul said men would be boastful in the last days. Again, there have always been boastful men who have had an inflated view of the contribution they have made to their own success. Paul was talking about the normalization of this attitude, when men would flaunt their achievements and believe they make them superior.

When they believe that, they have arrived at arrogance, another characteristic of humanity in the last days. Arrogance is the inflated view of one's worth, the belief that they are in some way superior to others. It can be based on everything from physical appearance to one's lineage, from what one owns to academic achievement. It manifests itself in racism, and all other forms of prejudice and in a failure to be thankful. There are many ways in which the arrogance of people is expressed, and there will always be expressions of arrogance that are made socially acceptable because the heart of men craves the strokes that arrogance provides.

Paul says next that during the last days people would be revilers. Literally, they would be blasphemers. This too has become a blatant element of our culture. In the name of "tolerance," good is labeled as evil and evil as good. Humankind openly maligns God, His people and His statutes and do so with the law's arms wrapped around them. If they acknowledge the existence of a god, they malign him so that he bears no resemblance to the God revealed by Scripture. Blasphemy has been normalized and protected in western culture and it is clearly rampant in other cultures where formalized religion clearly makes God into someone completely contrary to whom He has revealed Himself to be and His laws into lists that advance human and demonic agendas. Paul observes that men would be disobedient to parents. Again, this has always occurred, but Paul's observation is that it will become commonplace. We have witnessed the breakdown of most lines of authority beginning with the home. It is in fact true, that obedience must be learned. When it is not learned it is not done and manifests itself in everything from a lack of genuine spiritual behavior to outright criminal behavior. Almost every activity associated with successful living requires submission to authority.

We live in time when parents spend much to help their children learn every conceivable skill, but they neglect to teach them obedience and submission to authority. These children are destined for a rough life. And what is mentioned next flows out of this because a disobedient people and non-submissive people are also an unthankful people. Gratefulness comes from an understanding of how things could be, and that perspective is absent from the thinking of those who have eschewed authority. A lack of gratitude compounds unhappiness, promotes depression, encourages self-indulgence and generally makes people bitter and unpleasant. Ungrateful people are usually lonely and so it is a sin against one's own emotional health to become ungrateful. A characteristic of humanity since the time of Christ has been a growing irreverence. Irreligious or impious would be the term used to describe this condition and it is ironic. Since God revealed more of Himself and more of the truth, men would become less holy! This is as Simeon prophesied of Christ, that He was "appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed" (Luke 2:34). It is as he said. Impiety has always been popular among the trend-setters of the various generations and has become quite blatant in our society today among the rank and file.

3:3—unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good,

Paul continues his listing of 19 blights that will characterize humanity to increasing degrees as we move toward the second coming of Christ. The term the verse starts with is unloving, ἀστοργοί, which is the α privative plus στεργω, which means to cherish affectionately. So the word means to not cherish affectionately and speaks of being hard hearted to those by whom we should be touched. It likely describes one who has detached themselves from feelings that would be normal in their pursuit of their own needs and pleasures and so are without normal affections, willing to abuse, take advantage of, or in any number of ways step on those who should be dear to them. They can do so with little or no feeling of sorrow. This seems increasingly to be the case as we watch the crimes against children and spouses on the rise. It is the natural consequence of living against one's conscience that in time the most basic affections become warped or altogether set aside.

Paul then says that men will increasingly be irreconcilable. The word is ἀσπονδοί, and as in many of these words Paul employs the α privative, to reverse the meaning of the word and so express the opposite of admirable and good traits. In this case the word used is derived from the word for pouring out a libation, σπενδω. A libation was an important part of the ceremony solemnizing covenants, oaths, truces and various agreements. So the idea is either that humanity will increasingly be unable to come to terms with each other or that their word will increasingly be violated with each other. The latter is most likely in view, which would include the former. This can be abundantly illustrated both in our society as a whole and in the private affairs of individual life. Humanity has become increasingly less concerned with becoming right with each other and staying right, of making agreements and keeping them.

From this Paul moves on to the term malicious gossips. This is the term the NASB has chosen to render the word διαβολοι, or what we might refer to as devil-like or devilish. Now to us, devilish might include a lot of different behaviors. However, the basic meaning of the word is to falsely accuse or to slander. The word is a compound meaning “to cast down.” That is the basic mission and characteristic of the devil, he slanders. Since men will increasingly follow his way as they turn from the truth, it follows that they will be more like him and learn his ways. And so, we have become a society of false accusers and slanderers, of those seeking to gain an advantage by casting down someone else. People increasingly will use and take advantage of others. They cannot be trusted to conform their actions to “ethics,” or “codes of honor.” Paul then speaks of men being without self-control. The word is ακρατεις, meaning without power or strength. Amid all our self-determination and all the accompanying bravado, we have become weaker, unable to lead ourselves and thereby manage our own lives. Our appetites have surged out of control. They dominate and drive us to do things that we should never do. And so we see many examples daily of actions, from impulsive buying to drug addiction, that reflect the loss of self-control that is increasing the more society “develops.”

Men will become “brutal” Paul says. Perhaps that is the natural consequence of the loss of self-control. There is perhaps a logical progression in this list of 19 things and a case can be made that each flaw mentioned leads to the next. Paul’s design of this list can be argued but it is certainly true that the setting aside of restraint leads to brutality. Once inner standards are surrendered it is only a matter of time before external behavioral lines are crossed. While knowledge has increased and society has certainly gotten more sophisticated, we still see brutal things happening even in our homes. When heartlessness and a lack of self-control are combined with self-deification there is the potential for the most depraved actions imaginable and we witness them every day in our present world. Next Paul speaks of men being haters of good in the last days, or literally, “not lovers of good.” It is interesting to note again that in the wake of God becoming flesh, of revealing Himself so dramatically to humanity, of restoring to some degree knowledge of God and good that had been lost during the elapsed millenniums since the fall, men for the most part repeated Adam’s mistake and eschewed God. They did not allow themselves to be compelled by either His love, His power, or His truth. Instead, they have chosen (and choice is certainly the essence of the Hebrew’s concept of hate), to live apart from Him. They chose to remain in the darkness of error and deceit rather than in the light of truth. They have covered their ears and ran from God rather than running to His embrace. To run from God is to run from good and that is the great tragedy of the latter days. They have chosen to hate good. Instead of good, they choose what is expedient, what meets their need in the short term. Pragmatism is increasingly becoming the dominant world view. It is doing what works in terms of one’s own welfare or interests and is becoming the dominant force in shaping conduct in our present world.

3:4—treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

Men will be increasingly treacherous in the times after Christ. The word meaning to be treacherous means to betray, or to be a traitor. Like Judas, men functioning by mere instincts cannot be trusted though in nearly every case they have been trusted and entrusted. So given are they to their own needs and agenda that they will compromise any code of honor and any relationship and for seemingly little gain. A trustworthy man has always been a great find, and such a one is increasingly rare (Proverbs 20:6).

Recklessness will also be the norm among men. They will become more impulsive and when in leadership, create greater and greater messes because of it. The word rendered reckless comes from a compound Greek word “to fall forward.” It means to be rash. It is to fall forward as opposed to moving forward well prepared with a distinct direction and destination in view. This impulsiveness, this inability to delay gratification, and the neglect of what is true and right creates a moral vacuum that is greater than that produced by ignorance. As the gospel spreads and is rejected, the size of this moral vacuum increases and simply living by one’s instincts becomes more and more normal. The result is millions of decisions made each hour of each day recklessly, with no regard for moral propriety, for the rights of others, nor for the good of the whole. The long term and the higher good are increasingly cast aside.

It is easy to see how the bridge is crossed to the next thing Paul mentioned, conceit. The word carries with it the idea of being swollen with pride. Men become self-centered quite easily even with the truth and more so without its restraining influence. The term here is a perfect tense, indicating a past action with an abiding result. The verb means to make a smoke, i.e., to slowly consume without a flame. It likely is meant to express the idea of “a lot of smoke but no fire.” So in such a person you get all the liability of fire but none of the benefits. We live in a society of “smoke screens.” Image is big business. Many tout their greatness, but true greatness is hard to come by. They have so diligently given themselves to the cultivation of their image, that they have come to believe it. They have lost sight of their liabilities they have denied them so long. As a result, they have no consciousness of their need for grace.

This growing self-centeredness makes for a natural transition to the next thing Paul lists as characteristic of men, that they will be lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Western culture has “advanced” to the degree that more and more leisure time has been created. This has not turned out to be fertile ground in which things of God flourish. It has in fact, become that which allows man to pursue what is often his real god, pleasure. Pleasure is increasingly the idol of choice among developing people groups and while it has always had a strong presence it is embraced today in a much more brazen and shameless manner. Its messages are everywhere in our culture and the pursuit of happiness has become understood as the pursuit of personal pleasure. God is increasingly rejected, and His truth not seriously considered by many, because it is deemed that there is no real pleasure in His ways. The reality of course is that ultimately at His side are pleasures of unimaginable magnitude (Psalms 16:11).

3:5—holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these.

With this statement Paul completes his description of men in the last days. This statement is a very revealing one, and one that logically follows the things previously mentioned. When the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctifying man is resisted, then any relationship man might have with God is short-circuited and emptied of its life. It becomes at that point mere form. When we resist conviction regarding truth, whether we are regenerate or unregenerate, we deny faith its power and it becomes routine and ritualistic. It is reduced to form. The forms this takes are varied and numerous. It is sometimes a blatant denial of the inspiration of Scripture, or of the existence of the miraculous. At other times it is simply a refusal to let the Scripture hold sway over personal decisions. It can also be rote obedience and conformity to the Christian Code.

With so much emphasis recently within the evangelical community on “acting like a Christian instead of just talking like one,” we have created our own hybrid of form religion. We have lost sight of the fact that Jesus goal was that we learn to think like Christians, in line with the truth, not just act like Christians. Many Christians today are not practicing the life, they are practicing the form. So there are many different strains of this that Paul mentions, “holding to a form of godliness but denying its power.” The practical result of all of them is the same, a lack of a dynamic, life-shaping faith. The hard-hearted, or dry, form-focused Christian will live in the present with the same disease as the atheist. Both are outside the experience of fellowship with God. Both are in a spiritual wilderness, though perhaps not in the same wilderness. Of the two the Christian is to be most pitied and may be the most miserable, who has access to all he needs and chooses to deny himself access to it. All who model and advocate such a spiritual state are to be marked well and avoided. They will, through their cold and calculated logic, lead others into their error and into the same wilderness they are in. Their experience has intellectual and fleshly appeal. Theirs is a painless practice that doesn’t demand introspection or self-trial and evaluation. It does not orchestrate those times where the light of the truth reveals the true nature of their thoughts and deeds or the true motives of their heart. It involves only “happy messages” from God, not ones that make them squirm and get uncomfortable. There is no Gethsemane and no Calvary. But conversely, there is no joy of obedience, no quiet confidence in truth, no peace produced by faith. They have the form, but don’t have the power and it is a miserable life. It is also a contagious life and is to be isolated and avoided.

3:6—For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses.

Paul had observed a certain pattern of behavior, the details of which we cannot be certain, which he knew Timothy would also observe. He refers to it and categorizes it here so that Timothy would recognize it for what it was. Certain men who were of the character that Paul has just described with 19 different descriptive words and phrases, would gain a following among a certain kind of woman. They would do this by manipulating themselves into a position of influence with the wife. We know this because of the word rendered “enter,” which means to enter on the sly, or to worm one’s way in. And so, whether it involved romance of a physical nature, of an emotional nature, or just of a philosophical nature, these kinds of men gained a position of influence among women, but not all women, and not because they were women.

The women victimized are characterized by three expressions. First they are said to be “weak,” and the term used is that of being morally weak. So they are women who lack moral strength and conviction and so are vulnerable to the influence of men other than their husbands. Second, they are weighed down with sins. The word “weighed down” is a perfect tense, indicating a state arrived at through a past action. So these women, through a pattern of sinfulness, have become enslaved to certain habits that are not specified. Third they are led on by various impulses. They are not thoughtful in their responses, and they do not consider consequences. They are impulsive, directed by the need of the moment. These three things define those who become the victims of these men. Paul is not describing all men or all women. He is simply observing a condition that Timothy was familiar with. From our perspective it sounds like some very sorry males preying on some damaged females in order to get some need met. It sounds like a merging of various compulsions, addictions, obsessions and cravings that typically surround the domestic tragedies reported on our nightly news. “Extremely messy” is how we would term these situations. Whether Paul was observing these situations in the Christian community or outside it, the need for moral instruction and for the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Spirit was made evident by them. The next verse adds two more characteristics to the description of these women.

3:7—always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Paul observed that there was not lack of opportunity to learn the truth. There was in fact, ongoing learning and searching on the part of these women, and likely the men involved as well. This added detail makes us surmise that Paul is describing “spiritual gurus” of some sort that attracted female followers of a certain sort. The relationship related in some way to a search for truth, or more likely, it operated under that disguise and was about other things. The result was that the supposed agenda never was met, because the pursuit of the real agenda was hindering it. So they were ever learning. There was the activity associated with learning. All the rhetoric and props were in place. But with respect to truth, no progress was being made. We would not expect there to be. God only allows truth to be discovered by those who obey it. Those who do not, travel further away from truth. These that Paul is describing were not really motivated to learn. They were motivated to invent and fabricate a version of truth friendly to the lifestyle they wanted to live. Certain truths were “off limits” in their search because of the change in behavior that those truths demand. That has always been and will always be. It is why most searches for truth never arrive at the truth. There is romantic appeal to such a search, especially when the discovery is pre-determined!

3:8—And just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected as regards the faith.

According to ancient Jewish traditions as gleaned from early writings and the Christian apocryphal words, Jannes and Jambres were the names of Egyptian magicians who opposed Moses (Exodus 7:11; 9:11). Paul uses these names to give an example that would be well-known of the fact that wherever God is doing something, there will be opposition. Where truth is present there will also be a movement bent on overturning it.

This was true in the former days, and it will be true in the latter days. It is one thing that is constant wherever truth is present. Such men's quarrels are not really with the messenger but with the message and with God. Two things are said here about them. They have a depraved mind. The term refers to a mind that works without applying the truth and specifically the truth about God himself, His ways and His plan as He has revealed it in Scripture. It is not necessarily that they are deprived of this truth. They may or may not have heard it. It is that this truth has not come to bear on how they think, make decisions, or behave. They are separated from it either by choice or by ignorance. We know that every member of humanity starts this way. Truth, which Scripture compares to light, when accepted and applied, changes perspective on everything and so impacts the most practical and routine decisions. When it is rejected, there is an accompanying loss in moral capability. It may be partial in the life of a resistant Christian who then becomes morally impaired, or it may be quite thorough and dramatic in the case of the individual who rejects all moral standard and law.

When we speak in Christian Theology of the "total depravity of man," we are speaking of these ideas. Man, apart from the gracious act of God in revealing His truth and making Himself known, would not conform himself to the standard of God's truth. He would in fact, become quite unholy and progressively more immoral. If human history with the truth present and active is full of atrocity and if Christianity itself is somewhat of a sordid tale, how sorry would it all be if the truth were not at all present? Paul says these men are also "rejected as regards the faith." When men reject truth, they short-circuit the Holy Spirit. The question of whether the men Paul is referring to are Christians or not is irrelevant. They are likely unbelievers, but the stark reality is that when anyone refuses for whatever reason to be regulated by the truth, they separate themselves from fellowship with God and so are rejected in terms of His activity through the community of the faith. This is why the matter of "walking in the light," or allowing the truth to regulate one's life, is so critical to Christian living. It is why the book of 1 John is in the Scripture, so that we can know when we are "walking in the light"—allowing truth to regulate our lives. Many have said that 1 John is a standard by which we can tell who a Christian is. It is not. It is a standard by which we can tell when we as Christians (beloved children), are allowing the truth to regulate our lives. The men Paul has in mind were most likely unbelievers. That seems quite evident by his use of Jannes and Jambres as the basis for comparison. But the truth is that their problem was they were not walking in the light, and this is a danger that Christians can fall into. We can know the truth, but not regulate our lives by it and so find ourselves walking in darkness. All such individuals become dangerous to the ministry.

3:9—But they will not make further progress; for their folly will be obvious to all, as also that of those two came to be.

There is a limit to all disobedience. We do not always know what it is, but God has established a limit to evil's every movement. It will progress only to a point. Within the family of God this is true as well. God is faithful in bringing to light mixed motives and agendas along with concealed patterns of sin. Jannes and Jambres lacked power. They could do tricks and through sleight of hand make certain things happen. But they were illusionists who could only impact how things appeared, not the true nature of things. In the realm of the Spirit, it is the same. There are those who for various reasons are with us but not of us. They can create the appearance of spirituality and spiritual activity.

The presence of Judas among the twelve illustrates this and it could be that God's reason for allowing the betrayal was to provide us with a very stark illustration of the deception, trickery, illusions and delusions that are a part of the spiritual realm. Time and more precisely, God's work overtime, has a way of bringing such people's deeds to light and revealing their true nature. They often make a good first impression. They can take control of ministry from good-hearted people. They can seem like "the answer." But over time something does not sit well. The fragrance left behind by them is not of Christ. With the passage of more time their true character is revealed. God is faithful in this. Their progress may be dramatic, but there is a limit to it. Their folly will become obvious to all.

3:10—But you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance,

Having spoken of what man will be like and the mess that will tend to evolve in human affairs, Paul now exhorts Timothy with words that describe a very different kind of character. These are the things Christ produced in Timothy and in the lives of all who are following Him. There is a teaching that is Christ's that His own become versed in and shaped by. It was articulated very precisely by Paul.

Our experience should be shaped by that teaching. It should be our standard of truth. We must not allow ourselves and our ministries to be shaped simply by what works and certainly not by what is easiest or expedient. We must live by what is true because that is what is good and what is right. We must be shaped by a certain standard of conduct. We must not only believe and think right, but we must also behave right. Grace allows for mistakes and misdeeds. Praise God! We must not allow it to become a permit for conduct that we are attracted to that we know to be against God's will. We must shape our lives by a certain purpose. Paul's purpose was to further obedience to Christ, his own and that of others. It was his thought in all effort he expended. There is nothing which brings God glory like the obedience of man and to further it in us and others is to give Him a gift He loves. The gift He loves is our faith and trust in Him. We give it when we obey. It is not just conformity to a routine or a pattern that blesses Him. It is when His character and His word are so trusted that they are chosen over more attractive appearing options that He is blessed. As our lives and ministries grow in complexity, our faith should grow in its simplicity. We travel forward in terms of character when we travel back to a child-like faith. Simple trust in the simple truth leads to the development of all the intricacies of spiritual maturity.

We should be a patient people as well, living this life knowing that the reward and payoff is in the next. We should have the quiet confidence that all will be made well and right, unshaken by those seasons when the battle turns against us, and we sustain loss. As one has said, “The Church of God is an anvil that has worn out many a hammer!” It is true. God’s eternality should inspire us to patience. Love, the great virtue that Christ embodied, and that Paul wrote so eloquently of, he also lived. He modeled it and calls Timothy and us to it. It is the virtue that will right our every thought and action if we hold it as our standard and ambition. It will lend power and credibility to our words and to the movements we seek to organize and sustain in God’s name. It will open and touch hearts even those that seem unreachable. And in all this we must persevere. That is what you do when something is true and good, you do it and persist in doing it. Repeating it makes you proficient at it and increases your ability to take it even further. It is like the building of physical muscle. Our strength of character increases though persistent testing of its limits. So this process of our own growth and the growth of our ministry requires perseverance, which we must, through the Holy Spirit, exercise.

3:11—persecutions and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch and Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord delivered me!

In addition to pursuing the virtues listed in the previous verse that Paul had modeled, Timothy also followed him in enduring persecution and suffering. Whether this means he was punished with Paul, a companion on location with him though not a physical victim, or a victim of like sufferings through not with Paul in these actual events, is unknown. In any of these cases it would be legitimate for Paul to say of Timothy that he had followed him in persecution and suffering. We know little about these events. What we do know is recorded in Acts 13-14. In Antioch the Jews are said to have instituted a persecution against Barnabas and Paul. We are not told its nature. The result was that they were driven out of the district.

In Iconium an attempt was made to “mistreat and stone them,” and so they fled (Acts 14:5-6). And in Lystra, Paul was stoned, dragged out of the city, and left for dead (Acts 14:19). His statement to Timothy “what persecutions I endured!” is a statement of exclamation at their intensity. It is not an overstatement or exaggeration. The exact sense in which Timothy participated in these trials is unknown. He comes on the scene a couple of chapters later in Acts 16:1. Interestingly however, it is said of him there that “he was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium.” So Timothy had some history there, enough so that they thought well of him in those places, and it is likely that this reputation was built on the basis of his loyalty to the cause and mission in these difficult towns. The statement of Paul that ends this verse is one that is critical, “Out of them all the Lord delivered me.” It is a statement of great confidence and victory. We must remember it is not a promise, but a statement of an actual experience. The lesson of Lystra was that this deliverance does not mean that there will be no pain suffered or harm inflicted. It means that the mission will be served through it and the persons involved will be strengthened to endure to death or to live to serve another day. We know that God has delivered many in the physical sense. We also know that many have died but found strength to be faithful to the end. The Lord’s presence is always present. His deliverance, in the sense Paul uses the term here of physical survival, is a matter of His sovereign purposes.

3:12—And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Persecution is the fruit of man's sinfulness. He lashes out violently at those that bring him discomfort. It is characteristic of fallen humanity across the board and so is experienced whenever differences exist between people. Ethnic differences, political differences, tribal differences, physical differences routinely bring about persecution just as do religious differences. Differences create a threat and then an opportunity for feelings of superiority, which are always very appealing to fleshly men. From this wrong thought it is a small and easy step to create an advantage for oneself. So persecution for various reasons has always been something humanity has lapsed into, and this includes the Christian community. We cannot as Christians, deny our own guilt in this matter. Because of this human problem it is true what Paul says in this verse, that all who embrace godliness in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Such a life creates discomfort in others. It creates a response, and that response often becomes violent and cruel. It is a fact that cannot be more plainly stated than Paul's statement here. To choose to follow the holy lifestyle of Christ will bring a cruel and sometimes violent reaction from others. This is true from the disparaging remarks made among children on America's playgrounds to the routine killing of pastors in Indonesia and Sri Lanka. All who embrace the Christian lifestyle will feel the resistance of the mainstream.

3:13—But evil men and imposters will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

Though great advances have been made in so many areas of civilization, it does not follow that man has gotten morally better. There is considerable evidence that the Scriptures have been right on this issue and so proved their infallible nature. There have been countless inventions to raise the quality of life enjoyed particularly by the privileged. But successive generations have chronicled the erosion of morality and personal responsibility and the other noble virtues. The NASB translation of Paul's words capture the thought well. Paul had no illusions about the moral condition of the people of his time. They were bad. They would move from bad to worse. There would be moral entropy, a descent by evil men and imposters to greater depths of hypocrisy and depravity as they become more ignorant of and desensitized to the truth. In using the terms "evil men" and "imposters," Paul is likely referring not to every unbeliever or every person that is guilty of hypocrisy. He is likely speaking of those particularly evil people who have deliberately and intentionally aligned themselves against the truth. They have chosen to pursue life apart from their creator and have rejected His revelation. These live on the cutting edge of evil and boldly tread on what those before them have respected and revered. They deceive others, but tragically they are deceived themselves. They give impetus to others who have rejected the truth, flaunting what they believe is independence. But even as they confidently and rashly do this they increase their own blindness to spiritual reality and so deprive themselves.

It is the greatest of tragedies to witness, this form of spiritual suicide. They hasten themselves toward the second death (Revelation 21:8). Since the coming of Christ into the world, the truth incarnates, that truth has lifted many to greater dignity. But there have been many who have been absolutely destroyed by it and that is the nature of truth. It rebuilds and revitalizes those who accept it. But truth in any and every field becomes the formidable foe of those who take a deliberate stance against it. They lose opportunity of greater discovery, understanding and the advance that always goes with it. This is observable in the scientific arena and in the spiritual arena, for all truth is God's truth and has the same impact on those who refuse to acknowledge it. Paul is referring here to the greatest tragedy that can befall any individual.

3:14—You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them.

In contrast to those who have rejected truth, Paul exhorts Timothy to continue to allow truth to do its work. It is the nature of truth that once accepted it leads to more truth. As things formerly "learned" are pondered considering new truth, they are understood in a fuller, more precise way. And so, the truth of God is. It is not received in a lump sum, but in installments. There is much to ponder, and it is of great profit to meditate on it, to ponder it, to apply and re-apply it. And it is in every way profitable to do so, to continue in what has been learned. To do so is to learn even more. Spiritual truth is more fully grasped as it is lived. Life tends to illustrate and reveal the many dimensions of truth and so re-enforce its absolute nature. As truth is learned it is re-learned, that is, what you thought you understood at one point in life in terms of a verse or a spiritual concept, you usually come to understand in more fuller ways as other truth is pondered and lived. The result is that at times you smile at what you once said or wrote about the meaning of a spiritual concept. It can even be embarrassing!

That is the thing that makes the Bible remarkable. And so, Timothy is urged to continue, and a large part of the reason is who he has learned these things from. Paul, his mother, his grandmother has all been mentioned in this letter as people who have passed along truth to him. It is interesting that Paul does not appeal in this phrase to the fact that these things should be obeyed because they are true or good. Now that is implicit in what he says, but he is willing for the moment to stake the virtue of the principles to the character of Timothy's teachers. That represents the ideal in terms of the transmission of truth, when the mouthpiece of God lives the message so that their lives provide a living illustration of its credibility. Truth should be able to stand up to a pragmatic investigation (Hebrews 13:7). It will work in a life and in life.

3:15—and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Timothy is to continue in what he has learned because of who he has learned it from. That is the teaching of the previous verse. In this verse he is to continue in what he has learned because it is scriptural. It lines up with what he has learned and embraced as true from the time he was a child. It represents the structure for which the foundation was laid. It is interesting that Paul always represented faith in Christ as this, the logical response to the revelation of God in the Old Testament writings. Timothy was well-versed in the Old Testament. That is what is meant here by “the sacred writings.” (Though the evidence is considerable that the apostles recognized their own writings as on a par with the writings of the OT. See for example 2 Peter 3:15-16.) By these Timothy was prepared for the apex of revelation when God became a man and showed Himself and His ways to humanity in a fuller way. Specifically, Timothy through the Old Testament had wisdom. This wisdom enabled him to understand and accept as all Jews should have accepted, the life, sufferings and death of Jesus Christ and the prospect of His future return.

Knowledge of and wisdom in the Old Testament can and should lead to a specific faith, a faith that has as its object Christ Jesus. Faith in one God, Yahweh, when nurtured by special revelation, should lead to faith in the anointed one, the Messiah, Jesus. This was the teaching of Jesus, that the Scriptures spoke of Him (John 5:39). It was the experience of the Ethiopian eunuch as he listened to Phillips instruction from Isaiah 53 (Acts 8:26-40). It was the experience of the eleven, that as they understood the Old Testament their faith in Christ grew (Luke 24:44-49). To reject Christ is to reject God’s consummate work (John 5:37-47, 13:44-50). The grammar of this verse specifies this idea. The phrase rendered “through faith which is in Christ Jesus” could literally be understood to say, “through the faith of the in Christ Jesus sort,” or “through faith, the in Christ Jesus kind.”

Thus, there is faith and there is saving faith. Faith in God, when further revelation is accepted leads to faith in one God, Yahweh. This faith in Yahweh when further revelation is accepted, leads to faith in Jesus as the Christ to which the Old Testament pointed. God meets faith in general revelation with more specific, or what is called “special revelation.” If His revelation is accepted, faith grows into saving faith in Christ Jesus. Every person in Hell will be there because they personally rejected at some point revelation. This does not mean all who are there have personally rejected Jesus Christ, for in the sovereignty of God revelation of Jesus and who He is comes only to those who have already believed more general revelation. Men are judged because at some point they reject truth. Some do so at the threshold of salvation, rejecting truth about Christ and his work. Others reject very general information about God that can be logically deduced by the curious from what has been created (Romans 1:20). But all who perish will have this in common, at some point in a process designed to enlighten them spiritually, they turned away from the truth and did so because they did not want to believe due to the practical implications on their life. Timothy had been faithful at every point and so had come to saving faith. He had heard of Yahweh as a child from his Jewish mother and grandmother. He had learned as a child the sacred writings. At some point, when he heard of Christ, he had the wisdom imparted through pondering those writings to believe in Jesus as the one anointed by God to be Savior and King of creation. Thus, the “sacred writings” play an important role in bringing about thinking that leads to faith. The objective enabled the subjective. The following verses will explain the nature, character and power of those writings.

3:16—All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

Having spoken of the ability of the “sacred writings” to impart wisdom of the sort that leads to salvation, Paul now speaks in more detail about those “writings.” They are called “sacred writings” in verse 15 and simply “writings” in this verse. There has been controversy surrounding this verse over the years because there is no main verb in it. This is common in Greek writings of the era when the “to be” verb was understood and supplied automatically by the reader. It was understood without being stated. The argument is not over what the verb is. It is obviously the verb εἰμι, the common Greek verb of being. The argument is over where in the sentence that verb is to be placed. Conservative scholars maintain that it should be understood as it has been rendered in the NASB, right after “All Scripture,” or literally “all writings.” This has the effect of making the verse a statement about the character of Scripture as a whole. This rendering says that all the sacred writings are inspired by God. Liberal scholars want to place the verb after the phrase “inspired by God,” so that it reads “All writings inspired by God are profitable...” This is of course a completely different statement than that made by the NASB, the NIV or the King James versions. It is followed by the American Standard Version of 1901. It has the effect of saying that inspiration does not extend to all the Scripture. Those portions which are inspired are authoritative. The practical difficulty then faced is that of deciding which portions are inspired and this naturally leads to the authority in matters of faith residing in someone or something outside the Scripture.

Again, if the verse is to be rendered “All Scripture is inspired by God,” we have a statement made about the character of ALL Scripture. It reinforces what Paul has already said in the previous verse about the sacred writing’s ability to impart wisdom. It explains their authority and would motivate the reader to embrace them in their entirety. If this statement by Paul is to be rendered “All Scripture inspired by God is profitable . . .” then we have a statement made about the character of SOME of the Scripture, about the practical value of SOME of the Scripture and it would motivate the reader to embrace SOME portions of it at the expense of others.

The first rendering says that Scripture IS the Word of God and so labels it as a treasure. The second rendering says that Scripture CONTAINS the Word of God and so begins a treasure hunt! The first gives us a reliable authority by which we are governed, the second a floating standard that WE must govern.

The question is, which of these two things was Paul wanting to provide Timothy with? What seems most likely is that he would want to reinforce the “standard of sound words” (1:13-14) and provide Timothy with that which would govern him, his teaching and the church’s teaching. It would provide wisdom and be the standard of all supposed wisdom, as it had been already to Timothy and others. It would not be logical that Paul would be suggesting, after speaking of the wisdom imparted by Scripture, that only portions of them were authoritative and that our authority must govern their use. So while both renderings might be grammatically permissible, the immediate context, the context of the entire book of 2 Timothy and the context of all the Scriptures indicate that the rendering “All Scripture is inspired by God” represents the thought Paul and the Holy Spirit wished to convey to Timothy and to us.

To impart the other meaning to Paul's words has the additional difficulty of imagining Paul having a lower view of the Old Testament than what appears logical. Such a low view of the Old Testament would have been deemed preposterous in the circles Paul frequented before his conversion to Christianity. That meaning is imported by those with a low view of Scripture, whose low view serves their purposes well. We believe in the plenary inspiration of Scripture, that inspiration extends to every portion of it, that it is all equally inspired of God.

Now, what do we mean when we say "inspired?" It is a rendering of the Greek word θεοπνευστος. This is a compound word derived from the word for God and the word for breath. It conveys the idea of God-breathed. It is an important word because it says something about the process of God conveying through the vocabulary and style of the human author His exact thought for man without error. It is not simply that man was "inspired" as we often speak of writers, musicians and other artists. To convey the meaning intended it might be more accurate to say Scripture is "God-expired." It flowed from the heart of God outward, as in mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, so that man inhaled the breath of God. So Scripture did not originate in the mind of man, but in the mind of God. God so superintended the process that without destroying the literary style of the human author, or the author's personal interests, God's exact and complete thought for man was conveyed without error in the original writings. This that we call "inspiration" is verbal and plenary, that is, it extends to the very words of Scripture and to all its parts. This idea of inspiration is a watershed truth as might be imagined. Of all that could be written about it the next words are the most logical. With them Paul speaks of the value of the writings. He says that they are useful. That is perhaps the greatest of understatements, since they are God-breathed! The word rendered useful comes from a word that means to heap up or to accumulate. The KJV renders it "profitable." Paul names four things that the Scriptures are profitable or useful for.

First, the Scriptures are useful for teaching. They are a source of information. The word conveys not primarily the action of teaching but the material that is taught. So the King James Version has rendered it "doctrine." The Scripture provides us with a body of truth from the mind of God about all that he wished for us to know. It is wisdom conveyed through a variety of literary styles on an exhaustive array of subjects. Scripture is a reference source for the teacher that is vast in its detail. It is thus profitable or useful for teaching.

Second, Scripture is also useful for reproof. The word ελεγμα refers to the refutation of error. Scripture is a standard by which supposed truth can be judged and the subtlest of errors discerned. It sheds light on courses of action and reveals them for what they really are. It is authoritative because it is the Word from God and so becomes the standard by which all supposed wisdom can be compared, and its true nature discerned. It is useful for this, refuting error. If a thought or system of thought contradicts Scripture, then it contradicts God and is not His thought at all.

Third, Scripture is useful for correction. It not only is a standard of comparison that reveals error, but it is a clear and comprehensive statement about what is righteous and good. We do not have to discover what is right through trial and error, or by the process of elimination. The Scripture speaks to what is right and it does so clearly. By it we can correct our path. The word for correction means "to straighten up again."

Fourth, because it is God-breathed the Scripture is useful for training in righteousness. The terms used here speaks of the training “child managers,” those hired to comprehensively provide for the well-rounded development of Children, would provide. Scripture is useful for producing well-grounded and well-rounded disciples who have been freed from the extremes of instinctive living. Christ followers develop stability in every sense through interacting habitually and repeatedly with the truth of God. It is because the Scripture is “God-breathed” that it is useful for these things. It is a handbook for life and contains wisdom for all of life’s stages and stations. It addresses issues of design and function, but also the complex emotional matters of life as it must be experienced. It is a comprehensive description of how a successful journey in life can be undertaken, delivered through stories, poems and detailed instructions.

Through this verse Paul has characterized Scripture as that which is deeply profound. It is God-breathed, and that term’s implications are so vast that some have given a lifetime to describing them. His characterization of Scripture in this verse is also practical. Though it is a deep and exhaustive book it is also “useful.” It serves the scholar who would delve into the minutia of reality, and it serves plainer folks who would seek “how to’s” for successful living. The next verse provides a good summary of the overall purpose of Scripture.

3:17—That the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

The Scripture relates to the person of God regardless of whether they are male or female, their ethnicity, their economic or social status, level of education, or intellectual ability. It is simply for the “man of God”— every person who would obey Him. The Scripture serves them and their God well. God’s purpose in “breathing” it and bringing it into reality was that such people might be adequate. They would not be without help and resource. They would not just have good intentions but be frustrated in their desire and quest.

The Scripture is a very important part of God’s gracious provision for the moral incapability of man. In lieu of our condition, He has sent the Holy Spirit so that there might be a subjective influence that would draw man toward truth. The Spirit is God’s provision for pulling us along. He has also given the Scriptures, an objective influence, to make truth more fully known and available for our scrutiny. These two are God’s way of enabling us to live beyond mere instinct. The result is that there is both push and pull, an objective and subjective influence. Due to this objective revelation that the Spirit has always used, we are adequately equipped for every good work. Now what is a good work? A work is good when it is something that God wants us to do, and we do it His way. The Scripture helps us develop a pattern of thinking that enables us to re-train our minds so that we can discern and pick out the will of God from all the data and signals floating out there (Romans 12:1-2).

This verse summarizes well the great statements Paul made about Scripture in the last three verses. He has said that Scripture supplies us with the wisdom we need to have faith. The Scripture provides the objective facts needed that then enable the subjective to take hold of us (verse 15). He has said that Scripture is God-breathed and useful, providing teaching, refuting of error, course correction and training in righteousness. This verse says that it does these very thoroughly, so that we are equipped to discern and do all that God holds us responsible to do. There is one more thing that Timothy was to do with revelation and Paul will command and exhort him regarding it in the next verses.

2 Timothy 4

4:1—I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom;

Paul is about to make a very important command to Timothy. To mark it out and emphasize it as such, he employs some strong words and phrases. He begins by stating that his words will be a “solemn charge.” This then is not a suggested course, or even just a wise course. It is a solemn or we might say serious, urgent, and critical command.

Its nature is further reinforced by Paul’s stating that he makes it in the presence of God and Christ. He says in effect, “God is watching!” He conveys that it is God and Christ who command this, who hold Paul accountable for delivering to Timothy their order for him. So for this that Paul will say both Paul and Timothy are responsible for, along with all who have taken up the mantle of spiritual leadership in God’s Church. For these spiritual leaders will be judged. They will, whether alive at His coming or dead, be held accountable and their work and effort examined. Nothing, including death, will preclude the event.

There are several ways to view this judgment that God will bring about of humanity. It will in a sense be immediate and instantaneous. When He appears, we are told the “man of sin,” evil incarnate, will be slain (2 Thessalonians 2:8). There will be in Christ’s appearing relief and vindication for all who have believed in Him (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10). There will also be the individual and specific judicial acts associated with His kingdom and rule. These will involve the review, the pronouncement of judgment, and the actual carrying out of sentence with respect to each person. These sentences will assign certain consequences and blessings for all eternity. So God’s judgment with respect to His message for all men and for this specific command to Timothy will have consequences that will stretch into the years of His eternal kingdom.

4:2—preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

The command to Timothy is this, to preach the word. Of all the things that could be expounded on and drawn attention to, this is what Timothy and all who have opportunity to proclaim and teach will be held accountable for. There is much else Timothy would do in the course of being a leader. But this he must be certain to do because of the eternal urgency associated with it.

Preaching the word is urgent business because of the value of the sacred writings that Timothy has “cut his teeth on,” and about which Paul has just made some deep and profound statements. Due to their source, their character, and the practical value they are the thing to which God’s workman must be faithful, the tool He has provided for the achievement of His objectives and the basis on which all men will be judged and held accountable. The word, God’s revealed truth, is the thing that God’s workman must advance, because in the case of everyone it only reveals when it is known, and it becomes plain only as it is understood. Timothy’s work is first the proclamation of the word. He must make it known.

There is no “season” for doing the work of God. This was a statement well understood by a more agrarian society, where there is a time of the year, a month associated with plowing, planting, harvesting, all the specific jobs farming requires. There is no “season” for the proclamation of truth. It is an ongoing work. There are times it is received better, but how it is received should not be interpreted as an indicator of a proper season for preaching. Receiving truth has its season in the life of an individual. It is a work of grace done by God. Specific truth has its season for proclamation, and that is the task of the one proclaiming to determine what truth to proclaim. But the season for proclamation is always present, and we must be always doing that work by both our words and our deeds.

The truth is to be proclaimed by applying it to real life situations, both your own and others. Our tone as we apply the truth is to be marked by two things. We are to reprove, tell what is being done that is wrong and why it is wrong. That is what reproof is and it must be a part of what we do, though it must be done in conjunction with all that follows.

Paul tells Timothy the second thing he must do. Timothy must exhort. To exhort means to encourage. It means to speak words that affirm an action and to speak to them in a way that motivates the hearer to continue to do them.

So we are to reprove, use the truth to tell what is being done right and thereby to reinforce good. Our reproof is to be complimented by our encouragement. Reproof and encouragement are to be done with patience. This means they are done humbly, bearing in mind the difficulty of proper thinking and conduct. It also means they are done not expecting immediate results. They are done repeatedly with the whole process in mind. They are not done with an unrealistic expectation in view as far as a timetable.

Reproof and encouragement are also to be done in concert with instruction. We tell people what to do but we tell them how to do it. Preaching must have the element of “how to’s” in order to reflect God’s heart. He does not want us to simply deliver orders. He wants us involved in teaching others how to live by faith. Preaching is most often associated with reproof. From a biblical perspective good preaching involves reproof along with encouragement. It is also delivered patiently with a strong dose of “how to’s.”

4:3—For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires;

It is not as entertaining to study and master what is known as it is to speculate on what is unknown. A new slant is always intriguing, especially if that new slant allows us to escape an unpleasant responsibility. Human nature is very adept at justifying desired courses of action. If the justification can somehow acquire a theological flavor, it is so much the better! Paul was well acquainted with this tendency, as is the Spirit of God, and so this prediction is made of what will come about in the Church.

The time seems to have arrived very quickly and has lingered to our day. It is becoming more pronounced so that each generation of Christian leaders embrace this verse as one which describes the climate, they minister in. And so today we observe that people do not endure sound doctrine. The plain meaning of the words of Scripture matters less and less and Biblical literacy has reached a new low during a very literate church culture. Never have more people known how to read and never has more of the truth been put in print than today. Yet Christians are surprisingly ignorant of it. This is likely a willful ignorance. As fallen humans, we do not endure sound teaching. We want the sensual stimulation that comes with what is shallow. We prefer the noise of the rushing stream to the silent power of the deep river.

The imagery Paul uses here of ears being tickled is a deliberately sensual one. The wealth and prosperity gospel are a perfect example of the problem, though not the only one and not the worst. The evangelical churches contribution to this problem is the sermon that uses the text of Scripture only as a launch-pad for delving into whatever subject the preacher thinks might please the crowd, or whatever subject might meet some need he himself has. Our contribution is also the sermon that does not precisely align itself with the actual meaning of the words chosen by the authors of Scripture and inspired by the Holy Spirit. We must remember that in this context that is the primary message that Paul is conveying to Timothy, the value and character of the words of the writings we have called Scripture. These should be our focus.

The desire for sensual stimulation has always resulted in the pattern Paul describes here. It is a pattern that is as old as the proclamation of truth itself. It is decried in the writings of the Old Testament prophets. It is still with us and, true to Paul's words, is more pronounced than at any other time. We choose the latest greatest, not necessarily the soundest. This epidemic will grow, likely to indescribable proportions. We are moving further in that direction at an incredible speed. The time has come, yet we are only observing the lead-edge of the storm.

It is important for preachers to focus on soundness, and it is critical for listeners to prepare their hearts and seek what is true as opposed to what is desirable. There is hard work to do with respect to truth for both preachers and listeners, but it will yield a very desirable fruit. Picking and choosing what you want to hear and turning your ears from unpleasant messages that call for change will yield a very bitter fruit. This is the message of all of Scripture. Teachers and teaching should be chosen based on whether they are biblical and choosing them on any other basis is not only foolish but dangerous to the soul (see Jeremiah 5:30-31).

4:4—and will turn their ears away from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.

Here Paul makes the choice very plain, myth or truth. Myths have a sensual appeal, but they are myths. Truth can be disconcerting, especially if it is about oneself. But it is the truth, and it always leads to greater freedom. The myth offers short-term comfort, but it is imaginary. Truth is often disturbing, but it is the way things are. When responded to, it produces a sense of security and preparedness.

There is a deliberateness to the action Paul describes here. They turn away from truth. They deliberately stop listening to it. But seldom do they stop there. The human soul is such that it does not like to drift. It seeks explanations, moorings and a direction. When truth is set aside it is let go of in order to take hold of something deemed “better.” The result is that the person does not simply become sluggish or inactive regarding the truth, they become pro-active about the myth they embrace and pro-active against the truth. This is characteristic of the times that Paul saw on the horizon for the Church, and it is very plainly visible in our day.

4:5—But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Originally meaning to be free of wine, the term sober came to mean one who was self-controlled. It speaks of holding appetites in check, of not simply living according to instincts and desires. It is seeing clearly and reacting rightly. It is where leadership always begins. We lead ourselves first and set a right course for ourselves. It is the right ambition to do this in all things. Too many have left areas of their lives under the control of the flesh, and it always limits their ability to lead. Allowing the Spirit to rule in every area and in every matter is the key.

An unbeliever can develop a high degree of self-discipline. Paul is not talking simply of self-discipline or self-control here. He is speaking of Spirit-control because that is the ultimate level of self-control, when one can subject His actions and thoughts to the mind of the Spirit. This self-discipline energized by the Holy Spirit goes beyond normal self-discipline. It brings about an extra-ordinary ability to endure hardship.

The enemy, the nature of spiritual work, the nature of fallen humanity, and the nature of this world all ensure that there is continual hardship for one who desires to join Christ in doing what the Father is doing (John 5:19-47). So for Timothy to carry out his calling he would have to endure hardship. It is the mark of a good soldier that they can endure the rigors of life on the battlefield (2 Timothy 2:3), withstanding the enemies within, the longings for rest, comfort, and normalcy. All leaders need to find power from the Holy Spirit to withstand the attraction of these that lead us to set aside the work of God.

Timothy needed to do the work of an evangelist, teaching those outside the faith the truth about their condition, explaining the truths they needed to know in a way they could understand them to come to faith in Christ. An evangelist is a teacher, and one who would impact the unbeliever must be able and willing to patiently and relevantly teach them the truth.

Paul wanted Timothy to “fulfill his ministry.” There could be in life no greater achievement than that. Paul knew it and had spent a lifetime seeking to lay hold of that for which he was laid hold of (Philippians 3:12). Every person has a calling. It involves becoming something, a unique but authentic representation of Christ. It also involves accomplishing a series of tasks, real work. These two elements cannot be divorced from one another. We must become in character who God wants us to become or we have not been faithful. We must also put our hands to the specific tasks for which we have been gifted or we have “buried our talents” (Matthew 25:14-30). This is the ministry we must fulfill, the fight we must fight, the race we must run, the course we must complete.

But it is important to realize that the very fact that Paul is commanding Timothy to do these things is proof of the fact that they are not automatic. We do not have a “destiny” that we will realize apart from decisive and definitive action on our part. We must by faith obey, and all the power of heaven will come to our aid to bring about the completion of that work He wants to do in us and through us. With this verse we can see in Timothy the relationship Paul taught the Corinthians in 1Corinthians 12 between spiritual gifts and ministry.

It appears from all the exhortation of Chapters 1-3 that Timothy had the gift of teaching. Here he is told to do the work of an evangelist, the teaching of unbelievers and so fulfill his ministry. That which he was called to, his ministry, was evangelism. His gift of teaching enabled him to do it. Every person has a gift, a calling or ministry, and an empowerment (1Cor 12:1-7), which combined is how the Spirit manifests Himself to all through them. When we are conformed to this pattern we have accomplished and fulfilled that for which we were created.

4:6—For I am already being poured out as a drink offering; and the time of my departure has come.

A drink offering was an accompanying offering, offered in conjunction with the various animal sacrifices. It enhanced the offering, making it say just a little more to God. We see drink offerings from the earliest of time, such as when Jacob consecrated the spot at which God appeared to him and named it Bethel (Genesis 35:14). So the drink offering was in almost all cases not the main event but was part of the requirement. Paul’s use of the drink offering as symbolic of his giving up of his own life is consistent with what he has spoken of in other places (Philippians 2:7, Colossians 1:24-25). Our sacrifice, though not essential in the same sense as that of Christ’s, is never-the-less essential for the work God is accomplishing in the world. Our blood does not atone for sin, but our work adds to that of Christ to further the kingdom of God.

Paul could see the direction things were heading and knew his execution would come soon. Though it was not imminent, since he does expect to see Timothy again as the verses that follow will clearly show, the handwriting was on the wall, and he believed his fate had been determined. We have some uncertainties about the chronology of all these things as there are obvious gaps in our knowledge. But we do see in this statement Paul’s perspective on his life and his peace about its end. It was enough that he had known the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings and could be like Him in His death. Paul’s life was not the main event, but he had done his part to add to the life that Christ lived that was the main event.

4:7—I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith,

These three statements are each profound. They have become well known and express what should be the ambition of every Christian person. They provide three different lenses through which we can view life and gain insight and wisdom into its nature and processes. To be able to say these things and be assured by the Holy Spirit of their truth as Paul did would be very gratifying. By every human standard Paul’s life had been a failure. But millions have died surrounded by the symbols of success, without this inner peace and satisfaction.

The fight, the course, and the faith are common expressions in Paul's writings and convey much about a healthy and right perspective on life. The fight is one that must be fought well. It is not enough that we simply fight. Christians have historically fought quite well. The debacle of the crusades testifies to that. We must know what to fight and how to fight it. That is what will make our fight a good one. The fight is against evil, the person behind it, and its power to shape us. The fight is also against us, our tendency to be shaped by forces other than the truth. That is the fight that must be fought well. The challenge of the race is to finish it. It is not a matter of winning a competition against other Christians. It is not a matter of doing a few things well on occasion. It is a matter of repetition. It is enduring in the things that God wants us to do to become the people we need to be and to accomplish tasks that He has marked out for us.

Keeping the faith is the next profound idea. Keeping the faith is a matter of embracing a particular way of viewing God and living real life while maintaining that embrace. The safekeeping of truth has been entrusted to us and that means we must not alter it. We must live it, and we must pass it on to others.

These three figures of speech, the fight, the race and keeping the faith, provide a great perspective on the Christian life. They are inspiring and convicting words meant to shape our every decision.

4:8—In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will reward to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

This verse is speaking of a reward that Paul expected to be given by the Lord. Now we know that salvation from hell is the free gift of God in response to our faith in Christ's work on the cross. It is not a reward, but a gift. The word generally used for reward in Scripture is the word for wages. Our justification is passionately portrayed by Paul as a gift not a wage. Paul expected this reward because he had been faithful to the many implications of Christ's life and work. He clearly says that this reward is not exclusive to him but will be extended to all those who allow themselves to become gripped with the love of this unique life and submitted to its implications.

There are many questions surrounding this verse and the whole subject of reward. Coming on the heels of Paul's statement of his faithfulness to the mission, many have taken his words to be a statement of a reward he believed he would get for that faithfulness. If this is true it is safe to say that such reward is not given to all Christians, but to those who have willingly and faithfully set aside their present lives for the sake of the kingdom Christ will establish when He appears again on earth. To them this is a specific reward named "The Crown of Righteousness." It is like a Medal of Honor.

Others look upon the whole concept of reward for faithfulness as nonsense. They stress that any work done by us is really His work, the result of grace. They say our reward is to be with Christ and inherit all He is. They ask, "what could possibly be added to that?" Most of Christianity follows this latter position and there is little written about eternal rewards.

Before considering what this verse says it would seem that two things would argue in favor of eternal rewards. Both are very compelling. First is the teaching of Christ. On several occasions where he spoke of the kingdom of heaven, reward and one's station in that kingdom are definitely dependent on faithfulness to the work entrusted in this life (Matthew 19:27-30; 25:14-30, Luke 6:35; 16:1-13; 19:11-27, John 4:36, Revelation 22:12). So reward for faithfulness is clearly seen in Christ's teaching.

The second compelling argument for the existence of eternal rewards is the character of God. While He is the owner of all things and can certainly do what He wants (see Matt 20:1-16), He is portrayed consistently as a fair and righteous judge. The question must be asked, is it consistent with justice and with the way He actively judges to treat an obedient and a disobedient child the same? While He certainly could do this (since God can do anything), the real issue is what course of action is consistent with His character and with His word? These two factors, the teaching of Christ and the revealed character of God, argue strongly for eternal rewards for believers.

Having said that, what is this verse speaking of? It is important to note that the first word in this verse is a word that can be rendered "henceforth." It ties this statement to the one made in the previous verse. In that verse Paul made his famous statement about having fought a good fight. It seems from all of Paul's writings that this is not necessarily the case with all Christians. One can fail in discharging their Christian responsibility. If this were not a possibility, why would Paul spend so much effort in this and other letters exhorting against such failure? There is the possibility of failure, but Paul had succeeded where he could have failed.

The "henceforth" that begins this verse makes the verse a statement of result or consequence of the action previously expressed, the action of being faithful. The awarding of the crown is a result of fighting a good fight, whatever the crown is or whatever it represents.

The crown is said to be a "Crown of Righteousness." Now we know that all Christians, regardless of faithfulness, will be viewed as righteous and made to be righteous, for all of eternity. This is clearly not a result of their work or faithfulness in it but is a result of the work of Christ for them. So the "Crown of Righteousness" specifically connected here to Paul's faithfulness cannot be referring to the righteousness bestowed by God on believers strictly as a result of their faith, apart from their works. It must be referring to something additional, a reward for obedience, the righteousness built into a life by the Holy Spirit as we cooperate with Him and are faithful to the truth. So the grammatical linkage of this verse to the previous verse would seem to indicate that Paul is speaking here of eternal reward that he will receive for hard work and effort in the things important to God. We cannot say dogmatically what this "Crown of Righteousness" is. Is it a literal crown, in the sense of something to be worn on the head? It could be, but should likely be viewed like a king's crown, in that the significant thing is the position and privilege that goes with it. Is this "Crown of Righteousness" the name of a specific reward, like a Purple Heart, or the Nobel Peace Prize? Is this the specific name of the reward given to all who have love for the appearing of Christ? Some have suggested this and have said that this is a reward given to those who are consistently passionate about the event of Christ's return. It is probably best not to go this far, though it is a natural interpretation of the text.

Now what is “His appearing”? This term does not necessarily mean Christ’s future coming. Paul has used it earlier in this letter (1:10), to refer to the incarnation of Christ, His first coming. He uses it again earlier in the present chapter to refer to Christ’s second coming. So the term simply means His appearance on earth. To Paul, both of Christ’s appearances on earth constituted wonderful news, news that had re-ordered his life.

The “Crown of Righteousness” is likely a general term Paul employs to designate a personal reward given to those who, in response to the truth about Christ’s first and second coming, take seriously His teachings and conform their lives to them. So the crown is some recognition of their conformity to the sanctification process that God desires for all Christians. The “Crown of Righteousness” is a reward for the exercise of faith, trusting God enough to take Him at His word and obey Him in matters of practical life. It is a reward connected to our sanctification. Our sanctification is everywhere portrayed as our decisive willingness to be obedient and God’s enabling power in response to that decision that empowers us to demonstrate His character and do His work. It should be added in the interest of intellectual honesty, that the verb rendered “reward” by the NASB and “award” by the NIV would not have to be so translated. It could be translated simply as something given. However, in usage it is not generally used of bestowing a gift but of the payment of wages or of something due or deserved. Reward is a good rendering in lieu of how the word is used in the New Testament.

In summary then, it seems best to see “the Crown of Righteousness” as a term used for a reward that God will bestow on those who allowed themselves to be conformed through the ministry of the Holy Spirit to the lifestyle lived by Christ when He walked the earth. Because of this action of theirs, God deems them as having been good stewards of the truth, and rewards them in some way for that faithfulness. The “Crown of Righteousness” honors them for the degree of righteousness their diligence with respect to the truth allowed God to develop within them during their time in the evil world.

4:9—Make every effort to come to me soon;

This is a simple statement of urgency made by Paul to Timothy. The reasons for wanting him to do so relate to his emotions, perhaps the proximity of his “departure,” but also some practical reasons that the ensuing verses will refer to. The words “every effort” and “soon,” convey this special urgency.

4:10—for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

We do not know much about any of these men. We know the most about Titus, but we really don't know that much about him. Demas is mentioned two other times in the letters of Paul (Colossians 4:14, Philemon 24), as a fellow worker of Paul in Rome. His name means "popular." It would be awful to have said about you in the Scriptures for all of time and eternity this that Paul writes here regarding Demas. It is a sobering evaluation that we should all contemplate to see in what sense it is true of us. Does the Lord's work suffer in our hands because we love the present world? Have we set aside things that are noble for things that are transient? Have good, even elite people of God been left to serve alone while we pursue illusions? Have we set aside the opportunity to be part of something of deep eternal consequence for things that bring no satisfaction to the soul? This will be our habit when we allow ourselves to love the present world instead of that world which is to come. It is a matter of constant discipline to remind oneself of the eternal world. To choose that which is a part of that world will give us joy and peace in the present, as well as treasure in eternity.

Crescens is mentioned only here. His name means "increasing," and fittingly he was apparently increasing in trustworthiness as Paul has sent him to Galatia on official business of some sort. Tradition has it that he was one of the seventy and that he founded the church in Vienna in Gaul. We do not know the reliability of that tradition. Part of this tradition may be because the Greek word for Gaul was Γαλατία. But a group of migrating Gauls came to settle in Asia Minor around 278 BC, and the province they were eventually confined to came to be known by that name. This is likely the province where Paul sent Crescens.

Titus was sent to the Roman province across the Adriatic Sea from Italy. We are uncertain of what his mission was to that area.

4:11—Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.

Luke was to become the author who would contribute more to the New Testament in terms of volume, than any other writer. He would be used of God to place much of the apostolic teaching, thought and perspective into writing. At the point in time of the writing of this letter he was the only companion Paul had left with him in terms of his normal company. They had spent many hours together as the book of Acts indicates. There was likely no human being who knew Paul better than Luke did. It is quite possible that he did the actual writing of this letter to Timothy. Between the two men most of the New Testament was written and there is conveyed to us much of what we know about the workings of the early church.

The reference to Mark here is interesting considering Paul's early experience with him recorded by Luke in Acts (Acts 13:13, 15:36-41). Mark is a story of grace, God's ability to bring about change in a person so that they rise above what they once were. Paul's comment here that Mark is "useful" speaks volumes. It is a great compliment paid by a man who had to be convinced. It is also a great tribute to Barnabas, the man who had likely nurtured Mark when others had given up on him.

Paul was always thinking of the ministry. Though a prisoner at this point, he was thinking of how ministry could be orchestrated. There was a work to do, and Paul sought to accomplish its actual tasks and mobilize people to help him do so until the absolute end.

4:12—But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus.

This is another example of Paul focusing on the mission instead of his own circumstances. We get hints of Paul's need and desire for companionship in this letter, but we also see that Paul, rather than hoarding companions, sent them all off on various missions that would further the work in the Churches. There were concerns that he had for all the various locations, and he was pro-active in seeking to bring leadership to bear on them. We know nothing about Tychicus, except that he was trusted by Paul in the way this verse expresses, and that is a great compliment.

4:13—When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments.

Paul has said that the time of his departure is at hand, but this did not hang over him or totally pre-occupy him. It seems to have been more of a general sense he had about things, and this is well demonstrated by his requests in this verse. We don't know what the books were, but he considered them of value to himself in his current situation. The parchments could have been writings or writing material. Both would have been valuable. The cloak would have been a concern as he looked ahead to winter (see verse 21).

This request adds a very practical and personal touch to the letter and sheds light on Paul's pre-occupation with the things of the Lord. Our letters might have begun with such concerns, whereas with Paul they find a more proper place and are mentioned in passing after the matters of legitimate and eternal urgency are dealt with. It is a testimony to how Paul's mind worked.

4:14—Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds."

There is supposed information in Christian tradition about this man, but no information in Scripture other than this. There is a passing reference to an Alexander during the account of the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:33), but that individual does not appear from the account to be part of the mob against Paul. Wherever he was from it is likely that a metal worker would be opposed to the ministry of Paul just as Demetrius was in Ephesus. There the artisans were silversmiths and were against Paul because they profited greatly from making idols. They could see their livelihood threatened by his message. So it is likely that wherever Paul preached, since his message was against idolatry, those who cast idols in any way opposed him. This was likely the basis for Alexander's opposition and why it was very vigorous.

What is significant about Paul's statement in this verse is that Paul teaches that the Lord will take vengeance on such men. From the rest of Scripture, we see that this vengeance at times comes in this life, but quite often does not. God has a day appointed to deal with the arrogant and the proud and those who have done harm to His children. In the meantime, he is patient, because there are some such people, like Paul himself, who come to faith and prove useful. But the fact is that if repentance never comes about, then the Lord will repay and deal out retribution.

4:15—be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching.

Tradition says that Alexander doggedly persecuted Paul, making sure the Romans were well supplied with “evidence” and testimony against him, that he was a key figure in bringing about the death of Paul. We do not know the truth of that tradition, but Paul does say here that his opposition was vigorous. It was beyond ordinary. Paul had come to expect opposition. Alexander went beyond that normal reaction to the gospel.

In the previous verse Paul has left the matter in the Lord’s hand. But there is still the practical side to such a problem that he addresses here with Timothy. It is not that such men can be allowed to stop our efforts. But we do have to be aware of them and their efforts. There is a time to move away from persecution and a time to run straight into its jaws. Paul did both at various times. Here he reminds Timothy that such a man’s sordid efforts must be a part of what we think about as we carry out ministry. Paul was no coward, but he was also aware that if the Lord was not in a fight, it should not be waded into. This determination is part of being “on guard.”

4:16—At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them.

In one sense this is a remarkable occurrence, that of all those men who followed Paul, he can name no one who stood by him at his first defense. Whether this was a preliminary hearing, or as many have thought, a reference to the first of two Roman imprisonments, is open to question. Some have argued convincingly that Paul was freed from his first imprisonment and undertook another missionary journey. He was subsequently imprisoned again, Alexander being a key antagonist in that plot. In that case this verse and the one that follows are a reference to the circumstances surrounding the first imprisonment.

Paul’s attitude is that of the Lord’s. He was able to utter these words and that means he had been deeply blessed. To be able to let go of personal hurt and disappointment and to move on is the greatest of blessings. Though we have no power to grant such forgiveness, praying such a prayer is the mark of great power that comes from the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, for such an attitude is certainly foreign to human nature. It is the mark of one who has been themselves forgiven much and has pondered that forgiveness thoroughly. We can see this attitude modeled by Paul in this verse. In doing so he follows the Lord. But in verse 14 we have seen him say of Alexander, “The Lord will repay him according to his deeds.” He models the Lord in that as well. Both things are modeled by individuals in Scripture, cries for vengeance and cries for forgiveness, and God is in both businesses. What we must say is that there is a time for both things and the Holy Spirit will orchestrate both kinds of prayer. Both have this in common, they call on the Lord to act.

4:17—But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear, and I was delivered out of the lion's mouth.

The Christian is never alone, even when all have deserted him. When every human has deserted him, he is still in the company of the most important one, the Lord. And if the Lord is not with us, it does not matter who else is! The testimony of millions over the years is this, that He is sufficient. In times of loneliness, when we feel all is lost, we must turn to Him, and He will make Himself known. Paul experienced the strengthening of the Lord in a very practical matter, in articulating in some way a legal defense of himself that would bring about his release. The Lord strengthened him for this for a purpose, Paul knew that. It was not that he might simply “save his own hide” and experience life's pleasures. It was that a certain work might be accomplished.

We read in Romans that Paul had planned to visit Rome and travel beyond to Spain. He had a vision for a much broader proclamation of the gospel than life had so far allowed him. All the gentiles needed to hear. That was a very ambitious vision and desire. It is preposterous to imagine that by using the term “all the gentiles” Paul envisioned himself as having personally proclaimed the message to all and was therefore delusional. What he did envision doing and what he accomplished was to establish a vehicle(s) by which that proclamation would be made. He did so through establish gentile churches and through his writing. It is doubtful that he understood the eventual impact of his letters, but God knew what He was orchestrating and so was right in inspiring these words of Paul. Yahweh did provide for the world-wide dissemination of the gospel through Paul's work.

For this purpose, Paul was delivered from the lion's mouth. Whether this is a literal or figurative expression we do not know. It is certainly possible that he was literally thrown to the lions. It is also probable that the lion is a symbol here for imperial Rome and that Paul is speaking figuratively of his acquittal. As stated earlier, many believe that Paul was imprisoned by Rome twice, and that a missionary journey about which we know nothing, occurred in between those imprisonments. There is considerable evidence in favor of this idea, but such details of Paul's life remain speculative. Apart from such a scenario however, these words would be true only in the sense of Paul succeeding in some preliminary hearing to avoid punishment and simply delaying for a later time his trial. Under this scenario Paul was placed under house arrest, with considerable freedom for a period of years (Acts 28:30-31), awaiting his eventual trial in which he was condemned to die and eventually executed.

Again, the important message of this verse is that the Lord stood by Paul and helped bring about whatever the scenario was that allowed him to complete his life's work.

4:18—The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

This is the promise of the Lord to every obedient child. There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:31-39), and no one is able to pluck us out of His hand (John 10:27-29). This eliminates all possible threat against our eternal security.

These are the last great thoughts of the apostle Paul besides some words of personal greeting. The verse appears to be his intended benediction until he thinks of some people that he wished to personally greet. It is a message of security and confidence that has grown out of a life of trial and intimacy with God through it. These are insightful, but also invigorating words. They should comfort and motivate us. Considering them we must attempt and accomplish more. We must sacrifice more and push back the supposed limits of our endurance. There is nothing that can thwart our arrival in the Kingdom of God where we will have ample opportunity for rest and for pleasures far greater than this world can imagine. Today is the time for work and faithfulness. Sloth, a lack of courage, and an inability to persist can rob us of our prize in that kingdom. We must not let the trial and discouragement of all the evil deeds that befall us to cause us to become sluggish in eternal matters. He will deliver us; He will bring us there. We should occupy ourselves with what can be sent ahead.

4:19—Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.

Paul had met Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth (Acts 18:2). They had accompanied him to Ephesus and stayed on there (Acts 18:18-19). We know that they lived in Rome for a time and hosted a church in their home (Romans 16:3). They did the same in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:19). We know that they were tentmakers by trade, sharing this occupation with Paul (Acts 18:2-3). We know that they were of great value to Paul's work and to the ministry of the Lord.

From this we ascertain that Timothy was in Ephesus in Asia minor at the time he received this letter from Paul. That is where Onesiphorus lived as well since his family is greeted here. This greeting is valuable because it allows us to know a little more about such details that are not explicitly stated in the letter. It also allows us to interpret a phrase such as "all who are in Asia turned away from me" (1:15). It is apparent that in that phrase Paul is expressing how he feels, and in the word "all" is using hyperbole to emphasize the impressive size of the defection. It also helps to convey his disappointment, and perhaps to teach the young Timothy something about expectations in ministry.

4:20—Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus.

Again, these personal notes are of value for the details they contribute that help us understand other issues of interest as we study the Scriptures. Paul's letters are just that, letters. People mentioned in them were known to both parties so that nothing beyond what we could call a first name was necessary. We do not know how common many of the names were and so our assertions about the individuals named do have a margin of error.

The name Erastus is mentioned two other times in the New Testament. An Erastus is mentioned in Acts 19:22 as one of Paul's helpers whom he dispatches with Timothy on a mission to Macedonia from Ephesus. This is likely the same individual. The name Erastus occurs in Romans 16:23, where he is said to be the city treasurer. Since Paul wrote Romans in Corinth, we would assume that this meant that Erastus held public office in Corinth. Since Romans appears to be written after (probably Acts 20:1-3 is the time of its writing), the dispatch of Erastus with Timothy to Macedonia, the Erastus who was the treasurer of Corinth was a different man.

A Trophimus is mentioned two other times as one of Paul's helpers (Acts 20:4, 21:29). He is referred to as "an Ephesian" (Acts 21:29), and so information about his personal situation would be passed on to Timothy who was in Ephesus. It is interesting to note that he is left sick in Miletus. There were times in his ministry when Paul healed the sick, but here that did not happen and Trophimus is left to be cared for in the normal way.

It is interesting that the Miletus we know is only a short distance from Ephesus and so we are left to speculate as to why Paul would mention to Timothy what would seemingly be known to him by the time he received the letter. It is known that travel directly from Miletus to Ephesus in Paul's day was considerably more difficult. It is easy today due to the "silting in" of the gulf but required a long detour around the head of the gulf in that day. This may have prompted Paul to mention this detail to Timothy, thinking that the news may not have traveled very quickly.

4:21—Make every effort to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, also Pudens, and Linus, and Claudia, and all the brethren.

Paul wanted Timothy to come quickly, before the onset of winter when travel on the Mediterranean became impossible. Wherever Paul went he developed relationships and some of those people with whom Timothy was acquainted, or perhaps would become acquainted, are mentioned here. None are mentioned elsewhere, so we know nothing more about them. In the loneliest of settings, God does provide fellowship.

4:22—The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

Our spirit is a part of us that is very mysterious. It is the immaterial part of us, created by God and is eternal. It is the essence of who we are and who God made us to be. It is what makes us living beings. Our spirit was created by God and for God. When severed from Him it is restless. When rightly relating to Him it is at peace no matter what the physical circumstances are. All this means that it is a wonderful thing when we can say that the Lord is with our spirit. It means that in our innermost being we are at peace with our creator. We are doing that for which we were designed and made.

Timothy, as a believer, was indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He had the Spirit, but that did not guarantee that he would live in fellowship with God. It would depend on his obedience. Paul's desire is that Timothy would practice his faith in a way that would allow his spirit to be ministered to by the Lord through the Holy Spirit, because that is the secret of contentment. The Lord has promised never to leave or forsake us (Heb. 13:5). Therefore, we can say that this statement is not an appeal for the Lord to do something as much as it is for Timothy to live in a particular way and so have a particular experience. When we use such expressions as "God be with you," or "God bless you" we must understand that God's part in or experience of His presence is done. There is a life of faith that we need to lead to enjoy what is available to us.

Paul ends the letter as he had begun it, with an appeal to Grace. It is what we continually need, God's favor. We are always experiencing it and there is never not enough available. It would be accurate to read these words from the original language in this way, "Grace is with you." There is no more important resource to understand than God's grace, and there is not a more powerful truth we could reflect on than the grace of God. It alone is what changes life and lives.