

## **A Spirit of Power, Love, and Discipline**

**II Timothy 1:1-7**

**By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III](#)**

Turn with me to II Timothy, chapter one. We have been working through the three pastoral letters of Paul — I Timothy, Titus, and now II Timothy — for some months now on Lord's Day mornings, on and off. We've taken them out of the order that they're found in the Scripture. They move from I Timothy to II Timothy and Titus in your Bibles. We've taken them in chronological order, the order in which Paul wrote them, so we have moved from I Timothy to Titus, and now to II Timothy.

This is Paul's last letter. He writes it imprisoned and awaiting his sentence of execution. He's calmly facing the last great crisis of his life, and as he does so he affirms that he's an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he leaves a last message for his beloved son in the Lord, Timothy. We've seen Paul write affectionately to Timothy before. That language of fatherly love and concern comes through loud and clear in I Timothy, but it does so here, as well. In the introduction that we're going to read today you'll see again evidence of Paul's fatherly, tender affection for his son in the faith. Jesus had his beloved disciple John, and Paul had his Timothy.

But it's also very clear that Paul means this letter not just for Timothy, but also for the congregation that Timothy is serving. He wants that congregation to hear him say these things to Timothy. He wants that congregation to hear him say to Timothy, 'Timothy, be bold and strong as you minister the word,' because Timothy faced great obstacles, not the least of which from his own congregation! And so Paul wants that congregation to hear him exhorting Timothy to be bold and strong and courageous, to fear God and not man as he ministers to them, so that they will respect Timothy when he does it as doing what Paul says, in accordance with God's word and will for his life.

Now, there are several things to learn from this passage. In fact, it's so rich that we could do a series of sermons just on the first seven verses, but let me point you to four or five things in this passage that we're going to look at today.

First of all, look at verse 1. There you'll see Paul's ascription, how he identifies himself; and there's something we learn even from that ascription. And that's going to be the first thing that we study today.

Then look at verse 2. There's Paul's salutation, that is, his greeting to Timothy. And again, even in the greeting there is a benediction that teaches something to us about our dependence upon the Lord and His supply of all our needs.

Then thirdly, look at verses 3-5, because there's Paul's first word of thankfulness and gratitude in this letter. It's the beginning of the letter proper, but in it he gives thanks to God even though he is imprisoned; and he gives thanks to God specifically for what God has done in Timothy's life in implanting the seed of faith, but he also remembers what Timothy's grandmother and mother have done in passing on to him the truth which is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we see in those verses an 'other-centeredness' in Paul. He's thinking about others, instead of himself. And there'll be a lesson for us in that.

Then, look at verse 6. There's the fourth thing we're going to look at. Here's Paul's exhortation to exertion to Timothy. He's exhorting Timothy to exert himself in something; he's calling him to an activity in cultivating the gifts and graces that God has given to him, and that's something that we'll look at, as well.

And then finally, we'll look at verse 7, where Paul speaks about the endowment that has been given by God to all believers of a spirit—a special kind of spirit, and we'll consider that together today.

Before we hear God's word read and proclaimed, though, let's look to Him in prayer and ask for His help as we respond to it in faith. Let's pray.

*Our Lord and our God, we thank You for Your word. Your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our way. We bless You that we can hear the word week after week, as we are gathered together with our beloved brothers and sisters in Christ under that ministry of the word. It thrills our souls to think of the word that we heard read today from the second Psalm: a word that was written down 3,000 years ago, and yet it's just as fresh today as it ever was; in fact, it makes far more comprehensive sense to us than to the people that first heard it. And Lord God, we thank you that as we hear this word, we're hearing words of the great Apostle Paul, spoken in the last days of his life, written down 2,000 years ago not only for Timothy, not only for his congregation, but for us; for Paul himself tells us in these very letters that all Scripture is given by inspiration and is profitable for our reproof and correction and training in righteousness, to equip us for the living of the Christian life. And so we pray, O God, that You would make our hearts to hear Your voice and to respond to it in the reading of these, Your words. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Hear the word of God.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my beloved son: Grace, mercy

and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

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, longing to see you, even as I recall your tears, so that I may be filled with joy. For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well. 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. For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.

Amen. And thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant word. May He add His blessing to it.

The Apostle Paul is in Rome. He is awaiting the arraignment of sentencing. It is a sentencing in which he will hear the death penalty pronounced upon him. He will be taken out somewhere on the Appian Way after that sentencing, and he will be executed. He has been a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ all his life. He has taken the gospel as far as he could go. He longs to go further into Europe, to Spain; he longs to continue building up churches, establishing them in the truth of God's word—and yet, here he is in a dungeon.

And the Apostle Paul could have done many things. The first chapter of this book could be a litany of complaints: 'Here I have served the Lord all my life, and where do I find myself now? Awaiting death, unjustly, at the hands of pagans.'

It could be a litany of 'woe is me.' It could be a litany of how the church has failed him, how his needs aren't being met by the Christians who ought to be brave enough to surround him in these hours. But that's not what we hear from Paul. We hear confidence in the very ascription of verse 1—not confidence in himself, but confidence in God.

We hear a humble dependence upon God's divine supply of grace in the very greetings that he speaks to Timothy in verse 2.

We hear a heart of thankfulness in verses 3-5, a heart of thankfulness that serves as an example to every one of us going through trials.

In verse 6, we see an exhortation to activity in the Christian life, from someone who is chained up and can hardly be active. And finally, we hear a word of reminder about what God has endowed us with to live and minister in this Christian life. And I'd like to look at those things with you.

**I. Christians draw strength in trial from the knowledge of God's providence and promise.**

Let's look at the ascription first. He says that he's "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life in Christ Jesus...." Do you note the confidence? This man is in prison! He's awaiting death! And yet he's confident.

He's not confident in himself; he's confident in God. What does he point to in this passage? He points to God's providence and God's promise. Notice, he calls himself "an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the will of God." Paul is confident that the same God who by His will chose him out of his spiritual blindness to be a preacher of grace, that same God is the One who has him in this circumstance. That same God is the God who is in control, and so he is confident of God's providence.

And not only that, he's confident of God's promise. Look at the end of that verse. He's the apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of life in Christ Jesus. He's confident of the promise of God. Paul knew the power of the promise of God in his own life. Because of the faithfulness of God's promises to Abraham, Paul had been saved out of his spiritual blindness, brought into the marvelous light of Jesus Christ, and given the privilege of telling the world about it. Paul knew the power of the promise of God, and so in the midst of this depressing situation as a prisoner he speaks as one whose word has divine sanction. He speaks with confidence because he believes in the sovereignty of God's will, in the graciousness of His providence, and in the certainty of His promise.

And my friends, Christians draw strength in their trials because of their knowledge of God's providence, His will, and His promise. Every Christian is able to face the trials of life with this kind of confidence: not self-confidence, but confidence in God, and confidence in His will, and confidence in His ways, and confidence in the goodness of His promises. And Paul's words, even describing who he is, are a balm of comfort if we will listen, my friends, and if we will put our trust and hope in the places where he put his trust and hope, for we in and of ourselves do not have the resources to face the trials of this life. If we attempt to do it in our own strength, we will be broken, and we will either live in denial or in bitterness, or a little bit of both. But the Apostle Paul could live and minister in confidence because he believed...he knew God's will and God's promise. That's the first thing we learn in this great passage, and we haven't even gotten to the greeting yet!

## **II. Christians are consciously dependent upon divine supply for life and ministry.**

And you'll see that greeting in verse 2. Here's the second thing we learn. Here Paul speaks...he really speaks of the abundant supply which God has given to

His people: grace, mercy and peace. He's piling up those words of the spiritual blessings that God has given to all who trust in Jesus Christ, and then he points us back to the God who supplies that grace and mercy and peace; and he does that pointing to that divine supply, in order to remind us that we are utterly dependent upon God to live this life and to do ministry in this world.

"To Timothy," he says, "my beloved son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." Notice that benediction? It's a benediction, and the book isn't even over! It's a scriptural, apostolic blessing upon Timothy, upon this congregation, upon us. And what parts does it have? Grace, mercy and peace.

*Grace:* God's unmerited, pardoning and transforming favor and power be upon you.

*Mercy:* God's warm and tender affection for those who are in need and who are afflicted.

*Peace:* The fullness of God's blessings upon His people, because we have been reconciled to Him through the death of Jesus Christ.

'These things be upon you, Timothy,' he says, reminding Timothy of God's abundant supply. Timothy is dependent, he's needy, he needs God. Timothy is aware of his own limitations, but God has abundantly supplied for him.

And notice how God is pointed to by Paul. It's not just what God gives, it's that God the giver is pointed to: "Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." It is the Father who has loved and bestowed this grace, mercy and peace upon us, and He has done it without cost to us. No, all the cost has been borne by His Son, and so it is "Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." It is Christ Jesus who has given us that mercy at His own expense.

You see, even in his greeting to Timothy Paul is reminding Timothy of the enormous resources and supply which have been made for him by God. You see, the necessary equipment of our life and ministry is directly supplied by God, and Paul is reminding us of the richness, of the abundance of that supply, even as he gives a word of greeting to Timothy. And so we see Paul's confidence in God's will and in God's providence, and we see his dependence upon God's abundant supply in the first two verses.

### **III. Christians serve God with thanksgiving, whatever our circumstances**

But we see a third thing when you turn to verses 3-5. Now these verses are exceedingly rich, and really we see many things here, but let me just point you

especially to this. Did you notice Paul's gratitude and his other-centeredness in verses 3-5? Here is Paul, sitting in a prison awaiting his sentence of execution, and here are his words: "I thank God..." Instead of fixating on his own plight, instead of turning in on himself and counting up all the ways that he has been disappointed and frustrated—instead of turning in upon himself and talking about how his needs aren't being met, Paul begins with "I thank God..."; and his attitude, his thankfulness, his gratitude to God serve as an example to every Christian that we are to serve God with thanksgiving whatever our circumstances.

Now, here's Paul writing to Timothy: 'Dear Timothy, I'm in prison. I'm chained up. I'm in a dreary hole. I'm awaiting execution. And you know, I was just thinking: I'm so thankful to God for you, and I'm so thankful to God for the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that He implanted in the heart of your grandmother, who passed it on to your mother, who passed it on to you.' Here is Paul waiting to die, and he's thankful!

You notice the direction of Paul's concern? He's not turned in on himself. He's other-centered, and as he thinks about others and their situation and their need, this exhortation to Timothy flows, and then his thankfulness to God flows.

William Hendriksen says: "Sitting in his gloomy dungeon and facing death, Paul, far from complaining, as many people in similar circumstances would have done, meditates on blessings past and present, and sincerely desires to express his gratitude." 'Timothy, I'm in prison, and I just want to thank God for you; and I want to thank God for the faith in Christ that you have, and for the faith in Christ that your grandmother and your mother have.'

Friends, we ought to manifest that same kind of gratitude for God's providence, and if we will, it will enable us to transcend the circumstances that we find ourselves in, in life.

And, my friends, that attitude is not an attitude that is cultivated in us by our culture. We live in the richest culture in the history of the world. Now you would think that that would have sated us, and that we would have no further sense of personal need. But, in fact, what it has done is, it has turned all of us in on ourselves so that the first thing we think about in life is 'what I need', and we even think about that in relationship to God and the church: 'Is God meeting my needs? Is the church meeting my needs?' And here's Paul, and it's the last thing on his mind.

What is on his mind when he has genuine needs that need to be met is, "I thank God for you, Timothy, and for the faith which has been implanted in you." You see, that other-centeredness that Paul expresses here is totally counter-cultural. We think that God and the church exist to meet our needs, but Paul has heard the words of Jesus: "Seek My kingdom and My righteousness first, and then all

these things will be added to you.” Or, he's heard Jesus say that those of you who give up houses and fields and families for My sake, in this life and the life to come will receive a hundred-fold. In other words, Jesus says when we go the way of self-denial, when we give up our life, when we forfeit our life in pursuit of His kingdom, His righteousness, His service, He will abundantly supply all our needs and more.

But the focus of our attention is not on self and on others, it's on Him. We give ourselves away, and as we do so we find that He richly supplies everything that we need. And Paul is an example of it in this passage, in that attitude, that gratitude to God which can be thankful even in depressing circumstances.

And notice specifically, because I don't want you to miss this point, notice the power of the covenant of grace in the life of Timothy.

“For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well.”

Timothy was the son of a Jewish woman who came to faith in Jesus Christ, and a pagan Greek. Did you know that? Luke tells us that in Acts 16:1. As far as we know, Timothy's father never came to faith, but his mother, a Jewess, had come to faith in Jesus Christ; and, in fact, her mother was a believer. And Paul says, ‘Timothy, I've seen the faith of your grandmother and your mother, and I see that same faith in you, and I thank God for it.’ Do you see the power of God's covenant plan of grace wherein He brings His children into His kingdom through households—even when they're messed up? God's plan would have been for there to be a godly husband and father, and a godly wife and mother, together in that covenant household, showing the word of truth, living the life of faith before that young man. But even with simply a believing mother, God's covenant grace had prevailed in the heart of Timothy.

And, my friends, when you look at your own family and you say ‘there are so many things messed up’, you just remember the power of God's promises in the lives of Eunice and Lois and Timothy. God sends His word forth, and it will not return without accomplishing what He has appointed it to accomplish. The power of the covenant of grace in the life of Timothy is manifested in the fruit borne by these two believing women.

Mothers, don't ever underestimate what you are implanting in the lives of the children that God has given to you. Many a woman has been God's instrument to win her children to Christ...and her husband to Christ. May God grant that you follow in the line of Lois and Eunice.

#### **IV. Christians must not neglect cultivation of God's empowering gifts by**

## **which we minister.**

Well, there's a fourth thing to see here as well, because Paul doesn't simply express a gratitude which we ought to emulate, he also exhorts Timothy to exertion. He calls him to activity. You see it in verse 6: "For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God..." Paul is not scolding Timothy. This is not a harsh rebuke. This is not a word to Timothy, 'Timothy, you're lazy! And you need to get to work!' No, this is a gentle, tender, pastoral, fatherly reminder—but it's urgent. He urgently calls Timothy to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in him.

And this reminds us, my friends, that we must not neglect the cultivation of God's empowering gifts. This exhortation, you see, shows that the gift for service given to us by God does not operate automatically. It requires the active cooperation of its recipient. Paul's illustration, the language that he uses, is literally the language of a fire. God has given this gift. It's ablaze. Now, Timothy, you tend it. You keep it ablaze, you tend that fire, you make sure to stoke it and keep it going.

It's just like those that have been given a gift of strength, and they need to be strong to be an athlete. They may be naturally strong, but they still have to lift weights. Or, someone who has been given the gift of speed—they're naturally fast, but if they're going to compete, they've got to practice. They've got to run. Or someone who has been given the gift of music, and they play the piano or the viola or violin—they may have a natural gifting at it, but [they've] got to practice! You've got to cultivate the gift. And Paul is saying, 'The Spirit has engifted you, Timothy; I see those gifts, but you have got to exert yourself. You have got to cultivate those gifts.'

The Christian life isn't sitting back, letting go, and letting God! The Christian life is active service and cultivating the gifts and graces of the kingdom. We're going to sing in just a few moments (you may want to open your hymnals and look at it), *Am I a Soldier of the Cross?* at No. 573, and I love the second stanza. It's a question to ourselves. It goes like this:

"Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease?  
While others fought to win the prize, and sailed through bloody seas?"

You see the question. While some have gone the way of martyrdom home to God for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ and His testimony, is our number one desire in life to live comfortably? With the minimal amount of exertion and sacrifice necessary? Paul is saying to Timothy, 'That's not how the Christian life is lived.' We're called to spiritual ministry, and that requires spiritual resources, but those spiritual resources that God gives us must be cultivated: cultivated by prayer, cultivated by dependence, cultivated by self-denial. And Christians must not neglect the cultivation of God's empowering gifts by which we live and minister.



And so, Paul speaks of confidence in his ascription; he speaks of God's abundant supply and our dependence on that supply for ministry in his salutation; he speaks of his gratitude to God in verses 3-5, as he thanks God for what He's doing in the life of Timothy and his family; and now, he calls us to activity in verse 6. But there's one more thing.

## **V. Christians serve God by serving people with a strength that cares for others wisely.**

Look at verse 7. There God speaks of the endowment that He's given, not simply to Timothy, not simply to Timothy's congregation, but to all who trust in Jesus Christ. "God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline." Paul is telling us there that Christians serve with power, a power and strength that cares for others wisely. Christians fear God, not man. We're given not a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and self-discipline.

We've often spoken of Timothy's temperamental timidity. He was apparently temperamentally, personality-wise, ready to give way to the pressures of others; ready to be fearful of the conflict which he encountered in ministry and in the world. And Paul just reminds him here again: 'Timothy, we haven't been given a spirit of timidity.'

Timothy, we know, had ailments. He had stomach problems. He got sick frequently, and no doubt that led people to say things behind his back: 'Well, you know Timothy—he's kind of a sick-y'—and that would have made him timid, you might imagine. And he was young. He was younger than a lot of the people that he was ministering to and with, and he had determined opponents in the church. And he was ministering to a church that was being persecuted by the world. Why, it's enough to make you paranoid!

And so, Paul says, 'Timothy, let me just remind you that the Spirit of God has not given you a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power.' But don't you love what Paul says about that spirit of power? It's a spirit of power, and of love, and of discipline...sound-mindedness, sobriety.

Timothy must avail himself of that spirit's power, love and self-discipline in order to minister, because, you remember, Timothy has a pretty awesome task in front of him. He is going to continue to be a minister in this world without Paul. There will come a day soon after he reads these words, that there will be no more Paul in this world. Timothy, throughout his early ministry, could have always said to himself, 'No matter how far away Paul is, I know he's there, he's praying for me, he's God's man for God's work in God's time; I can write him for advice, I can come to him for help.' And suddenly, there is going to be a day when there is no Paul to go to, because Paul will have been martyred. And Timothy has to keep on ministering in that world, and so Paul says, 'Remember, Timothy: God's Holy

Spirit has granted to you a spirit of power, and love and discipline.’

I love what Calvin says about that. He says,

He speaks of this power as accompanied by love and self-discipline in order to distinguish the power of the Spirit from the intemperate zeal of fanatics, who rush in with reckless haste and boast that they have the Spirit of God. But the power of the Spirit, the powerful energy of the Spirit, is tempered by love and sobriety. It always has a calm concern for edification.

Isn't that interesting? Timothy's power is not so that he can lord it over the flock. His power is so that he can edify the flock, so that he can love God's people wisely.

My friends, Paul's words of greetings to Timothy, his words of counsel to this early Christian congregation, are just as relevant to us today, just as applicable as when he first spoke them. May God grant that we would respond to them in faith. Let's pray.

*Our Lord and our God, we bless You for Your word. We ask that You would make us to believe it, that we would emulate the Great Shepherd of the sheep, who laid down His life for the sheep and took it up again, and was exalted. And as we die to self and live to Christ, grant that we would be exalted with Him. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

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