

This second letter from Paul to Timothy – and the last inspired letter written by Paul – feels especially heartfelt and personal. It seems a good time to review the intertwined history of the apostle and his spiritual son.

We first encounter Timothy in Acts 16 as a disciple in Lystra, with a Jewish mother (Eunice) and Greek father. Timothy is already a Christian at this point. When was he converted? Acts 16 begins at the start of Paul's *second* missionary journey. His first journey had passed through Lystra and Derbe where he encountered persecution from the Jews (Act 14). In 2 Timothy 3, Paul reminds Timothy, "You, however, have followed ... my persecutions and sufferings that I encountered in Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra. And Timothy was known in Philippi, the scene of Paul's undeserved imprisonment (Philippians 2:22). It is very possible that Timothy was converted by Paul's preaching during his *first* pass through the towns and witnessed his sufferings firsthand.

In Acts 16:3 Paul invites Timothy to accompany him on his travels. Why wait until the second trip? Remember Paul's maxims: Do not be hasty in laying on of hands (1 Tim 5:22) and do not place a recent convert in a leadership role (1 Tim. 3:6). Whatever his later merits, Timothy was once a green convert. But by the time of Paul's second trip Timothy had proved his worth to those at Philippi, Lystra, and Iconium (Phil. 2:22, Acts 16:2).

It is the start of an enduring and fruitful relationship. We find Timothy at Paul's side when he writes to the Romans (Rom. 16) and again when Paul is held as a prisoner in Rome (Phil. 1:1). He is Paul's eyes and ears in Thessalonica and gives an encouraging report of the conditions there (1 Thess. 3:6). He carries reminders of Paul's teaching to assemblies needing a refresher (1 Cor. 4:17). And here he is Paul's delegate to the assembly at Ephesus.

Timothy also helps with Paul's everyday needs. In 2 Timothy 4 he is asked to bring Paul's books, parchments, and cloak to him. And here is a neat

connection that ranges across three NT books: Acts 18:4-5 tells us that Paul first works as a tentmaker in Corinth in order to not burden the Corinthian assembly (2 Cor. 11:7-9), preaching on the Sabbath (Acts 18:4). But in Acts 18:5 it appears that Paul has more time to be occupied in the Word after the arrival of Silas and Timothy from Macedonia. Could they have brought some means of support that allowed Paul to put down his tentmaker's needle and enter into full time service for the Lord (as we would say)? Yes, in all likelihood. Philippians 4:15-16 tells us that Macedonia in particular showed their fellowship with Paul by contributing to his needs. What better courier to deliver the donation from Macedonia to Corinth than Paul's beloved son Timothy?

Timothy is a thread that runs through the accounts of Paul's life and convincingly binds together Paul's epistles with the history recorded in the book of Acts. We do not read of Timothy possessing any personal magnetism or notable speaking skills (although he does possess *charisma* in the original Greek sense of a spiritual gift). We do read again and again of Timothy being trustworthy and faithful in large and small matters. Faithful to whom? To Paul? Yes, but far beyond Paul. "I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. **For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.** But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel" (Phil. 2:20-22). Timothy faithfully serves the advancement of the gospel and the interests of Jesus Christ, not his own. May the same be said of us.

Notes

This epistle does not readily fit into the sequence of the book of Acts. It is thought that after his relatively light two year imprisonment of Acts 28, Paul was released for a time and later rearrested and put under harsher confinement until his execution. 2 Timothy would have been written during the second imprisonment, after the conclusion of Acts.

1:5 Fathers of this time were the main teachers of their children, but Timothy's lifelong knowledge of the Jewish scripture (2 Tim. 3:15) apparently came from his mother.

Questions for study and discussion:

1. In 1 Timothy Paul starts by saying he is an apostle by **command** of God. Here it is by the **will** of God. Which of these is the stronger mandate?

2. Is there significance to the order of grace, mercy, and peace?
3. How is Paul serving God with a clear conscience different from his ancestors doing the same?
4. What would it mean to “fan into flame” (rekindle, stir up) a gift? How might we accomplish this in ourselves or other believers?
5. For each of these “spirits” give an example of how it might be shown in a Christian:

Fear:

Power:

Love:

Self control (sound mind):