

Paul is urgent in his request that Timothy come to him. He repeats his plea in verse 21 there coupled with his need for his cloak before winter. There was no heat in prisons in those days. Couldn't/wouldn't some local brother in Rome see to his comfort and needs? Did those he had greeted so warmly in his epistle to the Romans now forsake him whom they had enthusiastically welcomed a few years before upon his first arrival as a prisoner? Rome had just burned. Nero, the Emperor, had blamed the Christians and instituted severe persecution. They were unable to go out in public, or visit Paul in prison. If it was too dangerous, why was Paul urging Timothy to come? Only Onesiphorus (1:16), a foreign visitor, had been courageous and caring enough to minister to Paul's needs. What had happened to him? He apparently was no longer doing so. Had he died? Had he gone home to Ephesus?

If no one was visiting Paul in prison and no one stood with him, but all men forsook him (v. 16), who are the four named in verse 21 and "the rest of the brethren." mentioned in verse 21? What about Luke (v. 11)?

If Paul was in prison how could he have "left" Trophimus in Miletum sick? Evidently he had not been in custody long. (Note he didn't heal him.)

Why did Paul want parchments if he was expecting to die soon? Were they written upon or blank? Was he going to write more? If he was going to die he would go with his boots on so to speak.

Were the books for him to read or refer to, or did he send for them to remove them from Ephesus where the saints had turned away from him? Were they the scriptures for Timothy to preserve for future generations? If so had Ephesus become an unreliable place to preserve them? If so how ironic, for the Ephesians had publically burned all their occult books upon their conversion years before. Now were they too unreliable to be custodians of the truth?

Why was Timothy called away from his post at Ephesus when Paul had specifically left him there in 1Timothy 1:3? Was the state of the Ephesians hopeless? Was Timothy a failure? Yet later, John reportedly wrote his three epistles from there and possibly his gospel too.

Did Paul really need Timothy with him more than the Ephesians needed him? Was Paul selfish in his duress? Why wasn't Luke's presence sufficient?

If not in Ephesus, where was Timothy to find men of like mind to recruit to receive and pass on the truth taught and preached by Paul over the years?

Was Paul's ministry/gospel still accepted anywhere at all? Peter endorses it to the scattered believers of like precious faith, 2Peter 3:15-16. Paul says he has sent Tychicus to Ephesus, perhaps to replace Timothy. But Demas has forsaken him. Why? "Having loved this present world." Two others are gone too, not included

with Demas, they are more likely on other missions for the Lord. Neither Paul or any one else was coordinating the Lord's servants then, none should today either. The Lord is Lord of his servants, with no hierarchy between!

But Paul wants Timothy to come and when he comes to bring Mark with him. Mark had matured and become profitable for the ministry. Remember Mark had been recruited by his uncle Barnabas to accompany him and Paul on their first missionary journey, Acts 13. Mark had quit early and left them for home. When Barnabas wanted to take him along again, Paul refused. (Though Barnabas was right about Mark's character, he pushed him too hard too soon, jeopardizing a potential lifetime of service for the Lord. Barnabas forfeited further serviceability with Paul for the sake of a blood relation, Acts 15.) We know Mark spent some time close to Peter who calls him his son, 1Peter 5:13. Peter had failed before. He could help Mark. Paul's patient tough love yields results, Colossians 4:10. Mark has now proven himself useful, and holds no grudges. Paul is happy to have Mark's faithful services now. He knows Mark will eagerly come to help even though under much more trying circumstances than the first time. Mark has a servant's heart and becomes one of two non-apostolic authors of a gospel. These two, Luke and Mark, were evidently together with Paul for his last days.

Then there are the enemies. We sometimes can't mollify them. They can be resourceful, relentless and hateful in word and deed. Even the apostle Paul must simply warn others of Alexander and leave him to God. He does not curse him or condemn him but simply calls upon the Lord to reward him according to his works. A very similar statement to his earlier remark commending Onesiphorus for his loving care (1:16-18). He doesn't bring a railing accusation. He does not call down a curse on him as he does on those who preach "another gospel," Galatians 1:6-9. There he twice says "Let him be accused!" We don't know if he was the same as some other mentions of an Alexander. All we know is there he was, a daunting undaunted foe. There have been many others out there and still are. Beware, but don't run scared. And don't be tempted to curse any man.

Then there is Nero. Paul's heart of love brings the gospel of grace even to this cruel, depraved ruler and his royal court. He didn't figure in Paul's original stated objective in seeking to come to Rome for a time of mutual refreshing in the scriptures, Romans 1:8-13. But he went to Jerusalem first and there was placed in protective custody. Subsequently, feeling endangered in the hands of a corrupt local Roman ruler he appealed to Caesar. So he went to Rome in chains. The Lord had told him on the ship in the storm on the way to Rome he would survive to witness there to the highest earthly authorities, Acts 27:24.

But under house arrest, with limited fellowship with the saints there (Acts 28), he was eventually released. Apparently he didn't have contact with the Caesar then. This second time he does and expects they will ultimately execute him. The Jews' national rejection of the Lord was sealed by the stoning of Stephen. The Gentile world's destiny was doomed by Rome slaying Paul, the apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. They also killed Peter, the apostle to the Circumcision, and destroyed the temple in Jerusalem thirty some years after Stephen's death.

Paul has been before Nero once already. None stood with him, but all in Rome forsook him. He forgives. The Lord was with him and as promised enables him to present the gospel to the most powerful men on earth. And he was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. In this epistle we have Satan in two characters. The wily serpent, working through Hymenaeus and Philetus, Jannes and Jambres, and other evil men and seducers. The roaring lion in Alexander and Nero and the like. The discouraging

failing of the saints, turning from Paul in Ephesus and forsaking him in Rome added to his misery. But the encouraging thoughts of the faithful lightened his heart as well, Timothy, Lois Eunice, Tychicus, Luke, Mark, Crescens, Titus, Aquila and Priscilla, Onesiphorus and his house. Most of all, he recognizes the Lord that never forsakes and is with him through all.

He salutes Prisca and Aquila and the house (family and servants) of Onesiphorus at Ephesus. He has enough contact with the saints at Rome he can send greetings from four named, and a general hello from all the brethren. Yet he feels so alone. So alone. Fellowship in the profound loneliness of the Lonely One before the cross. But he blesses. "The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit, (singular, Timothy, and you and I, personally). Grace be with you (plural, you all collectively as a group). Grace be with the assembly at Ephesus and all the assemblies on earth and down through the centuries. Amen.

By Ron Canner, August 9, 2006