



“Paul and Timothy”

1 Timothy 1:3-7, 6:3-10; 2 Timothy 3:10-17

The elder and the younger, brought together by God to spread the Gospel.

In the course of this series on Paul, we’ve met many who labored alongside him and helped the gospel to flourish. None seem more personally close to Paul than his younger associate Timothy. The two spent many years and miles together, working to proclaim the Good

News of Jesus Christ. Timothy’s story is spread across the book of Acts and many of Paul’s letters. Here is a lightly-edited Bible dictionary entry on Timothy.

Timothy first appears in Acts 16:1–3 as Paul’s disciple whose mother “was a believer; but his father was a Greek” (v 1). He was a third-generation Christian after his mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois (2 Tim 1:5). The apostle Paul, undoubtedly Timothy’s spiritual father, refers to him as “my true child in the faith” (1 Tim 1:2); he perhaps converted Timothy on his first or second missionary journey. The son of a Greek (or Gentile) father, Timothy was yet uncircumcised; however, when Paul decided to take Timothy with him on the second journey, he had him circumcised so as not to hinder their missionary endeavors among the Jews.

Timothy, who was well spoken of by the believers at Lystra and Iconium (Acts 16:2), became Paul’s companion and assistant on his second missionary journey at Lystra. He traveled with Paul into Europe following the Macedonian vision. When Paul decided to go to Athens, he left Silas and Timothy at Berea to establish the church there (17:14). Timothy and Silas eventually joined Paul in Corinth (18:5). He next appears with Paul in Ephesus on his third journey (19:22), from where Paul sends him into Macedonia ahead of himself. In the last mention of Timothy in Acts 20:4, he was included in the list of goodwill ambassadors who were to accompany Paul to Jerusalem with the offering for the Christian Jews.

Timothy is often mentioned in the Pauline letters. His name is included in the introductory salutations of 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon. Timothy’s presence with Paul when he wrote these letters confirms the accuracy of the references to him in Acts. He was in Corinth on the second journey when Paul wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians, at Ephesus on the third journey when Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, and in Rome during Paul’s first Roman imprisonment, when he wrote Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. He is mentioned in the introductions of 1 and 2 Timothy as the recipient of those two letters.

In the closing salutations of Romans 16:21, Timothy is listed along with others who send their good wishes to the believers in Rome. In 1 Corinthians 4:17 and 16:10, Paul speaks words of praise for Timothy as he sends him with a message to Corinth (see also Phil 2:19–23; 1 Thess 3:2–6). In 2 Corinthians 1:19 Timothy is named, along with Paul and Silas, as men who were proclaiming the good news about Jesus Christ. Paul put Timothy in charge of the church at Ephesus and wrote him two pastoral letters to help him perform that responsible task.

In Hebrews 13:23 the author (probably not Paul) tells his readers that Timothy had been released from prison, and that he hoped to come with Timothy to visit the readers of that letter. By this note, we know that Timothy experienced imprisonment.¹

Quite a resume. To sum it up, Timothy was a trusted co-worker of Paul’s. Paul once wrote, “I have no one like him . . . like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel” (Philippians 2:20-22). Because of his mother, Timothy had evidently been steeped in the Hebrew Scriptures from a very early age. Paul reminds him that those sacred writings were given to teach him and help him truly live out the Good News. We also need to remember that the writings Paul refers to in these verses is not the entire Bible, but only the Old Testament, for he is writing only 30-35 years after Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Nonetheless, the message of salvation begun in the Old Testament had been fulfilled in Jesus, and that is what Timothy is to preach (2 Tim 4:2). Moreover, just as the Jews had a tradition of sacred and inspired writings, so would the Christians, who came to understand that the writings of the Old Testament and the New Testament were inspired by God in a way unlike any other literature. Paul puts this quite bluntly when, in 2 Timothy 3:16, he refers to the sacred

¹ Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (pp. 1258–1259). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

writings as *theopneustos*, literally “Godbreathed.” Though the process of inspiration is a mystery,² God is the source of the writings that God’s people came to embrace as Scripture.

Paul’s leadership and shepherding of Timothy extended to every part of life, for our life in Christ has no bounds. Paul even wrote to Timothy about money.

Longing to be rich – or at least look rich!

The heart. Look at what Paul writes in 1 Timothy 6:9-10: “people who long to be rich . . . the love of money . . . craving money.” Longing, loving, and craving are all matters of the heart. Who or what do we love? Who or what do we long for? Who or what do we crave? Do we strive first for wealth or do we strive first for the kingdom?

Paul lived two millennia ago in a world far different from our own. But when it comes to the dangers of pursuing wealth, his world must have been much like ours. For many, their pursuit of wealth is successful. They achieved fat bank accounts, piles of stuff, and the status that goes with it. Yet, they also reap lonely, isolated lives filled with brokenness and pain. So many temptations. So many harmful and foolish desires. So many bad choices.

Contentment and the godly life

Paul gives Timothy two pieces of practical advice for avoiding the trap marked “the pursuit of money, stuff, and status.” First, he urges Timothy to learn the art of contentment. Despite the numerous hardships of his own life, Paul has “learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need” (Philippians 4:11-12, a letter written from prison). How has Paul learned this? He has learned this from God. It is God who gives Paul the strength that he needs to be free from worry and anxiety.

Second, Paul urges Timothy to pursue a godly life rather than pursue wealth or possessions or status. Timothy is headed in the right direction, toward God rather than away from God, but Paul knows that there are many potential traps and temptations that will tempt Timothy, and few are more attractive than the love of money. Timothy must ignore these traps and hurry past them.

A living legacy (2 Timothy 3 above)

Paul also instructed Timothy in Holy Scripture, urging him to “continue in what you have learned and firmly believed.” Timothy is to cling to the “sacred writings” that will teach him about salvation through faith in Jesus.

These writings are what we often call the Hebrew scriptures or the Old Testament. They can’t be the New Testament, for though some of the NT writings existed at the time, none had been collected or disseminated as “scripture.” Nonetheless, these OT writings, which never mention Jesus by name, still point to him as the realization of God’s millennia-old promises to redeem humanity.

Thus, though Paul can’t be talking about the NT, his words still reveal the long Jewish tradition of there being sacred writings that are inspired in a way that other very helpful writings are not. “God-breathed,” as Paul puts it in the Greek.

We Methodists hold that the writings that constitute Scripture are the 39 books of the OT and the 27 books of the NT. Other Christians would define the list a bit differently, but all Christians embrace the central place of Scripture of the body of Christ. As John Wesley was, we are truly a people of the book.

But it isn’t always a simple thing to engage Scripture, so much of it seems foreign to our 21st-century world. Many years ago, a church member gave me an interesting metaphor – warping into Scripture. Here is a bit of what I wrote at the time.

Warping into Scripture??

"Frank walked out of the MRI imaging center, then looked at his wristwatch before placing a call on his cell phone and catching an Uber."

A rather ordinary sequence of events nowadays. But try and explain that passage to someone who lived in biblical times. Even if you translated it into Greek or Aramaic, it wouldn't make any sense because your audience would not have the contextual framework to understand what happened. But if you could -- in a manner of speaking -- thrust that person

² Christians do not hold that God dictated the Bible in the same way that Muslims believe God dictated the Quran in Arabic. We believe the Bible is God’s word for his people, yet preserves the genuine collaboration of its human authors.

through a contextual time warp where the cell phone, Uber, etc. were at least explained in a framework he could process, then his understanding of the passage would be quantumly enhanced.

Now go the other way. Just because we live in technologically advanced times, we face no less of a challenge in understanding the context of the Bible and the times in which it was written. Without the context, the message of God is -- simply put -- garbled in transmission. Therefore, it is vital, so to speak, to warp yourself into the context of the era when the Scriptures were written.

It comes down to this: we try to pull God into our story when we ought to be stepping into God's story. We need to enter the Bible, to step within God's story so that we can discover who God is, who we are, and find there the answers to the deepest questions of our lives.

There's a reason that the Bible is largely a collection of stories. We can enter a story in a way that we cannot enter any other type of literature. We can inhabit a story. We can imagine ourselves in a story. We can warp into Scripture.

But warping into Scripture is hard, often more difficult than we think. After all, the Bible is ancient literature. We are a long way removed from the world of pharaohs and Pharisees. We need to be biblically literate if we are going to enter these stories and see the richness of God's word. We cannot read Scripture well if we lack the basic skills, which are grounded in *context* and *connection*.

Every biblical story and passage is embedded in an historical, geographical, and cultural *context*. The more we understand about this context, the richer our reading of the story. Knowing that Jewish men certainly did not pick up the hem of their garment and run, deepens our appreciation of the father's joy at the return of the prodigal son. Knowing that women didn't make trips to the well at midday, helps us to know that the Samaritan woman Jesus meets at a well has come at a time when she can avoid others. Knowing that the Jews despised the Samaritans is essential to reading the parable of the good Samaritan as shocking and subversive.

In addition to context, we need to be able to *connect* one story or passage to others. There is an over-arching unity in the Bible; it's the story of God's work to renew the cosmos and restore humanity to the loving relationship with God for which we are created. Every story or passage has something to offer on its own, but grasping the larger meaning helps us to hear the echoes of Scripture that are woven throughout the Bible and to see ourselves properly as actors in this ongoing narrative.

Here are a few examples. How many of us really connect the story of the Exodus with the story of Jesus' last supper and crucifixion? How many connect Jesus' many references to himself as the Son of Man with Daniel 7? How many connect the Revelation 22 promise that we shall see God's face with Moses' inability to see God's face and live? How many connect Jesus' temple cleansing with Jeremiah 7? In these and countless other connections, the deep richness and transformative power of Scripture is revealed.

Until next week!