

II TIMOTHY

**The Second Letter of Paul
to Timothy**

Introduction

The church historian, Eusebius, writing in the opening years of the fourth century, has this to say regarding Paul's Second Letter to Timothy:

After defending himself, the Apostle was again sent on the ministry of preaching, and coming a second time to the same city suffered martyrdom under Nero. During this imprisonment he wrote the Second Epistle to Timothy, indicating at the same time that his first defence had taken place and that his martyrdom was at hand.

– *History of the Church*, 2.22

All the indications are that Eusebius is correct. Paul writes from prison (1:17). He has been in Asia, for he mentions that he 'left Trophimus ill in Miletus' (4:20). This must have happened after his first imprisonment in Rome, because Trophimus was in Jerusalem when Paul was taken into custody (see Acts 21:29), and Paul could not have been to Miletus between that and his two-year house arrest in Rome. He seems also to have visited Troas recently (4:13). Timothy seems to be somewhere in the Roman province of Asia. Paul asks him to give his greetings 'to the household of Onesiphorus' (4:19), who is also mentioned as having contributed to the work of the church in Ephesus (1:18). When Paul writes: 'I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus' (4:12), it is unclear whether he is saying that he is sending Tychicus who can be a support to Timothy in Ephesus, or whether perhaps Timothy has found Ephesus too hard and has left there so that Paul is replacing him.

Paul is back in Rome and in prison. This imprisonment is not like the house arrest mentioned in Acts in which Paul 'welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance' (Acts 28:30-31). This time a friend had difficulty finding him (1:17), and he is 'chained like a criminal' (2:9). He has already undergone a trial which was successful in that it did not lead immediately to execution (4:16-17), but he knows that death is not far off (4:6).

We refer the reader to the Introduction to the Pastoral Letters (page 634-637) where we looked at the question of authorship. Even scholars who find reasons to assert that Titus and 1 Timothy are written by a later disciple, find little or nothing here to support a similar conclusion. There is every reason to be confident that in reading 2 Timothy we have the privilege of reading Paul's final communication with a man who has been a close companion for more than twenty-five years, and for whom he has the deepest affection.

The Structure of II Timothy

1. Paul greets Timothy and thanks God for his faith	1:1-5
2. He exhorts him to stand by the faith of which Paul is an apostle	1:6-14
3. News concerning individual Christians	1:15-18
4. Another exhortation to fidelity, even when it involves suffering	2:1-13
5. How to deal with heterodox teachers	2:14 - 3:9
6. Last advice in the light of Paul's approaching death	3:10 - 4:8
7. Conclusion	4:9-22

The liturgical readings

1:1-3,6-12	9th Wednesday of Ordinary Time Year II
1:4-5	not in the Sunday or weekday lectionary
1:6-8,13-14	27th Sunday of Ordinary Time Year C
1:8-10	2nd Sunday of Lent Year A
1:15-18	not in the Sunday or weekday lectionary
2:1-7	not in the Sunday or weekday lectionary
2:8-13	28th Sunday of Ordinary Time Year C
2:8-15	9th Thursday of Ordinary Time Year II
2:16-26	not in the Sunday or weekday lectionary
3:1-9	not in the Sunday or weekday lectionary
3:10-17	9th Friday of Ordinary Time Year II
3:14 - 4:2	29th Sunday of Ordinary Time Year C
4:1-8	9th Saturday of Ordinary Time Year II
4:6-8,16-18	30th Sunday of Ordinary Time Year C
4:9-15,19-22	not in the Sunday or weekday lectionary

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,

²To Timothy, my beloved child:

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

Paul refers to himself by his Roman family name (see page 11). In earlier letters when Paul introduced himself as an ‘apostle’, it was a sign that he was writing in this capacity and so with the authority of Christ. This was the case even in his earlier letter to Timothy which, as we observed, was not so much a personal letter as directions intended for the communities in which Timothy was to act with authority. This is not the case here, for this is a truly personal letter written to ‘my beloved child’ (see also 1 Corinthians 4:17). We looked at Paul’s relationship with Timothy in the introduction to 1 Timothy. When Paul calls himself ‘an apostle’ here, it seems more an indication of the way in which this old man sees his identity. For a reflection on the significance of ‘Christ’ in ‘Christ Jesus’ we refer the reader to the commentary on Galatians 1:1.

Special to this greeting is the phrase ‘for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus’. During his earlier imprisonment in Rome he told his beloved Philippians: ‘my desire is to depart and be with Christ’ (Philippians 1:23). Now, in prison again, and realising that his death is fast approaching, this seventy year old missionary is not surprisingly looking forward to enjoying that special eternal intimacy with Christ that will be his beyond death.

He wrote to the Corinthians: ‘in the Son of God, Jesus Christ, every one of God’s promises is a “Yes”’ (2 Corinthians 1:20). For thirty years Paul has given his all to proclaim Christ to all and sundry, to Jew and Gentile, in Asia Minor and Greece. It has been his assurance of the love of Christ for him that has sustained him, and now, as the time of full communion approaches, he looks forward to the promise of life that is ‘in Christ Jesus’. This most typical of Paul’s expressions was the subject of a reflection in the commentary on Romans 8:1-2. It is this life that has been the subject of all his preaching and writing, for the gift of the Spirit is to draw us into the communion of love with God which Christ himself is experiencing. There is no other life worthy of the name. In his earlier letter he spoke of it as ‘a promise for both the present life and the life to come’ (1 Timothy 4:8). Paul has lived ‘in Christ Jesus’. He looks forward to the fullness of the promise in ‘the life to come’.

The greeting is very like that of 1 Timothy, even to the unexpected inclusion again of ‘mercy’ along with ‘grace’ and ‘peace’. We reflected on the significance of ‘grace’ and ‘peace’ in the commentary on Galatians 1:3, and on ‘mercy’ in commenting on Ephesians 2:4. For a reflection on the significance of calling God ‘Father’ see commentary on Galatians 1:1. For the significance of calling Jesus ‘Lord’, see Galatians 1:3.

Paul follows the address with the customary expression of thanks in which he introduces what are to be central themes of the letter. He is longing to see Timothy. This is a letter from a man who is capable of offering deep friendship and who has a deep need to receive it. We are reminded of his words to his dear friends in Philippi: ‘I yearn for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus’ (Philippians 1:8). He wrote to the Thessalonians: ‘Timothy has just now come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love. He has told us also that you always remember us kindly and long to see us—just as we long to see you’ (1Thessalonians 3:6). This capacity and need for friendship is, incidentally, a measure of the pain caused him by his being rejected by the bulk of his fellow Christian Jews who distrusted him. In spite of the decrees of the Jerusalem Assembly, a determined group continued to follow him around, insisting that the observance of the Jewish law was essential for anyone wishing to receive the salvation offered by God through the Jewish Messiah, Jesus. This was a ‘thorn in the flesh’ (2Corinthians 12:7) of this zealous missionary who saw in his fidelity to his mission a way of carrying to the world the faith of ‘my ancestors’. Paul will keep coming back to the intimate bond that he shares with Timothy (see 1:8,12; 2:3-13; 3:10-12; 4:5-8), a bond of deep affection and of shared faith. It is not difficult to imagine how encouraged Timothy would have been to hear Paul assure him of his prayers and to know that Paul is confident in his faith.

Paul assured the Romans: ‘I worship God (*latreuō*) with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son’ (Romans 1:9). In assuring Timothy here that he worships God ‘with a clear conscience’, he is not claiming to be sinless. He has already said: ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost’ (1Timothy 1:15). Against those who are using his imprisonment as proof that he is out of favour with God, he is assuring Timothy that, whatever his faults, he has been faithful to the commission given him and that it is the faith of his ancestors that he has been preaching.

It is Timothy’s faith that means everything to Paul, for it is faith that is our bond with Jesus (see commentary on Galatians 2:16). Paul’s memories go back to his first visit to Timothy’s home town, Lystra (Acts 16:1-2), some twenty years previously (Acts 14:8-18), and the faith that ‘lived in’ (*enoikeō*) his grandmother and mother. Faith is the gift of the Holy Spirit who makes a home in our hearts and in our lives.

³I am grateful to God — whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did — when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.

⁴Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy.

⁵I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.

**6For this reason
I remind you
to rekindle the
gift of God that
is within you
through the
laying on of my
hands;
7for God did not
give us a spirit
of cowardice,
but rather
a spirit of power
and of love and
of good judgment [NRSV
'self-discipline'].**

Paul reminds Timothy of the gift (charisma) that he received when he was commissioned for his task by Paul 'through the laying on of my hands'(see the commentary on 1Timothy 4:14). Being a gift of the Spirit, it consists, as do all the gifts, of a special flame of love which is capable of burning ever brighter. Besides, as Paul assured the Romans, 'the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable' (Romans 11:29).

We are not told why Paul finds it necessary to warn Timothy about 'cowardice'. In a letter to the Corinthians some ten years earlier, Paul wrote: 'If Timothy comes, see that he has nothing to fear among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord just as I am'(1Corinthians 16:10). Timothy may have had a naturally timid temperament. He was also relatively young to be exercising authority in Ephesus (see 1Timothy 4:12). Perhaps he left his onerous ministry in Ephesus (see the Introduction). Whatever the reason, Paul reminds him that the special gift of the Spirit that he received at his commissioning was a 'spirit of power and of love and of good judgment (Greek: *sōphronismos*)'. Timothy's teaching and exercise of authority will certainly be effective, for its power to convince, to convert and to inspire does not come from him but from God himself. It is God's word that he is sent to teach, and God himself is the source of its power. As Paul reminded the Thessalonians: 'Our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction'(1Thessalonians 1:5).

Paul was writing about every Christian when he said: 'You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back in fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption'(Romans 8:15). How much more is this true of one who has been commissioned by Christ to carry out the difficult ministry of leading the community. It is important to note that Paul is not speaking about any kind of power. The power given to Timothy is the power of the Spirit, the power of God, the power exercised by Christ. It is therefore a power that is expressed in love. It is also a power that is characterised as '*sōphronismos*'. This is a quality which is highly prized by the Greek moral philosophers. However, it has been 'Christened' by Paul. As we noted when commenting on Titus 1:8, it concerns the way we think (hence the '*phron*') as a result of the salvation (hence the '*sō*') which is Christ's gift. It is thinking that flows from being in communion with God. In short, it is having 'the mind of Christ'(Philippians 2:5). All Timothy has to do is 'live by the Spirit' and allow himself to be 'guided by the Spirit'(Galatians 5:25).

Paul is suffering because he has been faithful to his commission to preach the gospel. The gospel is about ‘the power of God’, but not in the way that people expect. The power of God is the power of love, and the paradox of the gospel is that this powerful, healing, redeeming and saving love is expressed in ‘Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles’ (1Corinthians 1:23). Paul was ridiculed for believing as he did and for proclaiming it as good news, but, as he said to the Romans: ‘I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith’ (Romans 1:16). Timothy has experienced suffering, too, and for the same reason. Paul is offering his own example to encourage him.

We reflected on the place of suffering in the life of a disciple in the commentary on 1Thessalonians 1:6. It has the same role in our lives as it had in the life of Jesus. It is not the suffering which redeems. Much of it is inflicted unjustly by people who are not listening to God’s word. When, however, while undergoing suffering from whatever cause, we continue to love in the sense of offer ourselves to and for others, the love becomes more impressive and converting. In Jesus’ case it caused people to wonder at the communion of love which he had with the Father, which enabled him to remain so loving. It is the same with Jesus’ disciples, for people see that it is our sharing in the same communion that enables us, too, to love through our suffering.

This is so important to Paul, and his desire to be united to Christ is so intense that he experiences suffering with him as a privilege: ‘he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well’ (Philippians 1:29). Paul witnessed to the fact that it is the Spirit of Jesus living in him that sustains him, and that it is Jesus’ love that he is mediating. He is asking the same of Timothy. He is not asking him to suffer. He is asking him to be courageous in continuing in the mission that has been entrusted to him and not to give up when suffering comes his way. He, like Paul, is to rely ‘on the power of God’.

We recall Paul’s words to the Colossians: ‘May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience’ (Colossians 1:11). We have been graced with God’s own life, but ‘we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us’ (2Corinthians 4:7).

⁸Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God

⁹[God] who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. ¹¹For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, ¹²and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him [or 'what he has entrusted to me'].

In verses nine and ten, Paul gives a summary of the gospel which is like that found in Titus 3:5-7. The accent is on God's saving action through Christ (see the commentary on Romans 8:24, and the reflection at the end of the commentary on Romans). God's call is 'holy' because it comes from God the Holy One, and also because it is a call to live a life of holiness in communion with God. We recall Paul's plea to the Gentile churches: 'I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called' (Ephesians 4:1).

God's call, as Paul keeps insisting, is not in response to the good things which we do, nor can we earn it. It is a grace and the initiative is entirely from God. To quote again from his letter to the Ephesians: 'by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — not the result of works, so that no one may boast' (Ephesians 2:8-9). Since Timothy did not merit it by his goodness, he need not fear that any weakness of his will cause it to be revoked. From God's side the call stands. Certainly we can fail to respond, but we need never fear that God will revoke the call or take away the power and the love that will enable us to carry it out. All this is 'in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Ephesians 3:11). In commenting on Romans 8:1-2, we reflected on the rich significance for Paul of the expression 'in Christ Jesus'.

That God's eternal design for humankind has been revealed in Christ is central to the gospel. To the Colossians Paul speaks of: 'the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed' (Colossians 1:26). Death has been rendered ineffective in that physical death cannot take from us the life of communion with God who 'alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light' (1Timothy 6:16). The call Paul received was to be 'a herald and an apostle and a teacher' of the gospel (see 1Timothy 2:7). Timothy has been commissioned to carry on this mission.

It brings suffering with it, but Paul is confident that what he calls 'my deposit' (*parathēkē*) is in safe hands. He may be speaking about his life which he has 'entrusted' to Christ, and which he knows is in safe keeping till the day of judgment when all is revealed. He may be speaking about the gospel which Christ has entrusted to him. Either way, Paul is 'fully convinced that God is able to do what he has promised' (Romans 4:21).

In his previous letter to Timothy, Paul spoke of his life as a persecutor of the church, and added; ‘I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example (*hupotupōsis*) to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life’ (1Timothy 1:16). Once again Paul is offering himself to Timothy as an example, not now as a sinner whom God has generously forgiven, but as a teacher who has given to Timothy the healing, life-giving ‘word’ (*logos*) which he is to hand on to others. We are reminded of Paul’s insistence to Titus of the kind of qualities needed by those who are appointed as leaders in the community: ‘He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it’ (Titus 1:9).

The kind of holding fast that Paul is asking of Timothy can only be done ‘in faith and love’. The love of God that is revealed in Jesus is not something that can be grasped and memorised by human intelligence. It can be known only in the intimacy of communion that is faith (for a reflection on faith, see the commentary on Galatians 2:16). It can be known and handed on only by one who loves (for a reflection on love see the commentary on Galatians 5:6). The gospel is about God who is love. What is handed on cannot be true if it is not loving, nor can it be loving if it is not true. Words are important, as are the formulas of faith that have been refined in order to give a true, though necessarily imperfect, expression to the mystery. Orthodoxy, however, is more than fidelity to the right formulas. It is living a life of ‘faith and love’ – the faith and love ‘that are in Christ Jesus’ (see the commentary on Romans 8:1-2). It is the faith of Jesus that we share. It is his love that we receive and give to others.

Once again, Paul refers to something that has been entrusted (*parathēkē* see 1:12). This time he is speaking of the gospel (‘treasure’) which Christ, through the Holy Spirit has entrusted to Timothy (compare 1Timothy 6:20). It is something which Timothy can ‘guard’ only through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, ‘because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us’ (Romans 5:5).

¹³Hold to the example [NRSV ‘standard’] of the sound word [NRSV ‘teaching’]

that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

¹⁴Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

¹⁵You are aware that all who are in Asia have turned away from me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.

¹⁶May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain;

¹⁷when he arrived in Rome, he eagerly searched for me and found me

¹⁸ — may the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day!

And you know very well how much service he rendered in Ephesus.

Is Paul complaining that the Christians in Asia have made no attempt to contact him or to show their care? Is he referring to the failure of the Asian Christians in Rome to speak in his defence at his trial? Whichever is the case, there is a notable exception, Onesiphorus, whom Timothy knows from their time together in Ephesus, where he rendered much service (*diakoneō*). Some suggest from the way Paul expresses his prayer that Onesiphorus may have died.

The implication of what Paul writes here is that his imprisonment is quite different from the one described by Luke in the concluding chapter of *Acts*. This time he is wearing chains, and the Christian community in Rome is seemingly unaware of his whereabouts. It took a lot of persevering effort and courage on the part of Onesiphorus to search him out.

Paul continues the theme of fidelity to authentic teaching, and the need for courage to persevere in the face of suffering (see 1:6-14). The strength is not Timothy's own but is the strength of Christ given him when he was commissioned for his ministry (see 1:6-7).

Christianity is not a philosophy of life thought out by Paul and handed on to his pupils in the fashion of the philosophical schools of his day. It is based on events (see 2:8), and the teaching is about the meaning of these events as seen in the light of faith. It is teaching based on the gospel. Paul therefore does not appeal only to his own teaching, but to 'many witnesses'. The truth of the teaching which Paul gave Timothy is supported by the Christian lives lived by those who have believed in the gospel and lived accordingly.

Paul has already exhorted Timothy to teach the gospel and its implications faithfully (see 1:13-14). Here he instructs him to 'entrust it to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well'. A further link is being added to the chain of orthodox tradition. One way of doing this is to discern who in the community has the charism of teaching, and to endorse their ministry. Another important task is to appoint leaders in each community who are competent teachers (see 1Timothy 3:2). One of the main tasks of the person exercising supervision in the community is to 'maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you' (1Corinthians 11:2; see Titus 1:9)

A professional soldier has to commit himself to the task whatever its difficulty (compare 1Corinthians 9:7). He has an oath of allegiance to 'the enlisting officer'. Timothy has committed his life to the service of Christ Jesus.

An athlete, too, has to live a disciplined life (compare 1Corinthians 9:24), and he must 'compete according to the rules'. Timothy must live the gospel as, with Paul: 'forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 3:13-14).

Like a farmer, Timothy should expect to work hard if he is to enjoy the harvest (compare 1Corinthians 9:7).

¹You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus;

²and what you have heard from me supported by [NRSV 'through'] many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well.

³Share in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

⁴No one serving in the army gets entangled in everyday affairs; the soldier's aim is to please the enlisting officer.

⁵And in the case of an athlete, no one is crowned without competing according to the rules.

⁶It is the farmer who does the work who ought to have the first share of the crops.

⁷Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in all things.

⁸Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David — that is my gospel,

⁹for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained.

¹⁰Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

¹¹The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

¹²if we endure, we will also reign with him;

if we deny him, he will also deny us;

¹³if we are faithless, he remains faithful — for he cannot deny himself.

The focus of the gospel is on Jesus in whom the promises made to David are fulfilled (see Romans 1:3), Jesus the Christ, risen from the dead. Paul's suffering is part of the saving work of Jesus (see 1:8). We recall Paul's words:

Even if I am to be poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.

– Philippians 2:17

They can crucify Christ, but they cannot take away his life. They can chain Paul, but they cannot hinder the saving power of the gospel of God's love. Jesus endured, and God brought him through death to the communion of the risen life. Paul is determined to endure whatever happens to him in the course of the gospel. Christ has sent him on a mission and he does not want to hold back from being an instrument for all those whom Christ wishes to reach through him, all those whom God wills to grace through him with the gift of salvation and eternal glory.

In verses eleven to thirteen Paul seems to be quoting from a catechetical formula. Verse eleven repeats what Paul wrote to the Romans: 'if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him' (Romans 6:8). This is true now: 'I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me' (Galatians 2:19-20). Its full truth awaits 'eternal glory'. In verse twelve, Paul focuses on the endurance needed to be faithful to the commitment to give one's life to carrying on the mission of Christ:

He died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

– 2Corinthians 5:15

If we choose to reject the love offered us by Jesus, he has no choice but to respect our decision: 'whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God' (Luke 12:9). If having denied him we repent, as Peter did, we will certainly find his love welcoming us back (Luke 22:61-62). It is this point that is emphasised in the final verse. God is love. We cannot change that, and God will never revoke love, 'for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable' (Romans 11:29).

Paul is repeating a theme that recurs in the Pastoral epistles;

Avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.

– Titus 3:9

They are not to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies that promote speculations rather than the divine training that is known by faith.

– 1Timothy 1:4

From ‘explaining the word of truth’, we cannot be side-tracked into clever disputes which are concerned not with seeking the truth but with victory in debate. Timothy and those to whom Timothy is to entrust the teaching of the gospel are to avoid this. It causes people to go not towards wisdom but further away from true religion (towards *asebeia*, see commentary on Titus 1:1), a disregard for God which is recognised as the source of all sinful behaviour.

We speak of ‘progressives’ and ‘conservatives’. It should be clear that everything depends on the direction in which one is progressing, and on what one is conserving. If a progressive is one who is listening to the Spirit and journeying towards the fullness of truth, and if a conservative is one who is ‘guarding the good treasure entrusted to you’(1:14), then the Christian teacher should be both progressive and conservative. If on the other hand a progressive is one who is clever in ‘wrangling over words’ or is fascinated by ‘stupid and senseless controversies’; and if a conservative is one who is ‘teaching human precepts as doctrines’, and ‘holding to human tradition’, while ‘having a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God’(Mark 7:8-9), then a Christian teacher should be neither progressive nor conservative.

The deposit of faith is not a dead letter to be locked away so as not to be lost. It is a living word that guides us in our journey towards God and in our mission to the world. Paul calls his readers to ‘walk in newness of life’(Romans 6:4). This can only be done when the teaching that guides us is on ‘God’s firm foundation’(2:19).

¹⁴Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening.

¹⁵Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

¹⁶Avoid profane chatter, for it will lead people further away from true religion [NRSV ‘into more and more impiety’],

¹⁷and their talk will spread like gangrene.

^{17b}Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, ¹⁸who have swerved from the truth by claiming that the resurrection has already taken place. They are upsetting the faith of some.

¹⁹But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' [Numbers 16:5] and, 'Let everyone who calls on the name of the Lord turn away from wickedness.'

²⁰In a large house there are utensils not only of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for special use, some for ordinary.

²¹All who cleanse themselves of the things I have mentioned will become special utensils, dedicated and useful to the owner of the house, ready for every good work.

Hymenaeus was mentioned in 1 Timothy as someone who had been excommunicated from the community that he might learn 'not to blaspheme' (1 Timothy 1:20). This is the only time we hear of Philetus. Their teaching is that 'the resurrection has already taken place'. Paul wrote to the Colossians:

You have come to fullness in him ... When you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

– Colossians 2:10,12

However, Paul never ceased longing for the fullness of the risen life which lies beyond death, when we will enjoy unending communion with him who is the 'first-born from the dead' (Colossians 1:18), 'our hope of glory' (Colossians 1:27). There is still much to be done, and so Paul exhorts the Colossians:

If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above ... When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

– Colossians 3:1,4

It appears that Hymenaeus and Philetus have distorted the gospel. In claiming that there is no future resurrection to look forward to, they are neglecting hope. They may also be neglecting ongoing conversion of life.

The first quotation in verse nineteen, from the Septuagint of Numbers 16:5, reminds us of the words of Jesus; 'I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me' (John 10:14). God knows his own and will care for them, but we must resist iniquity. The second quotation draws out the implications of Leviticus 24:16 which is a warning to those who blaspheme God's name. Paul is using it to urge repentance on those who teach error in God's name.

Each of us is precious in God's sight: 'we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life' (Ephesians 2:10). If we have allowed ourselves to be corrupted, we must allow God to purify us, so as to be 'ready for every good work'.

The word ‘passion’ (*epithumia*) is quite common in Paul. Strong feelings, of course, can be good, as for example when Paul expresses his passionate longing to see the Thessalonians again (1Thessalonians 2:7), or his profound longing to ‘depart and be with Christ’ (Philippians 1:23). When they are misdirected, however, strong feelings can be a vice, as when Paul exhorts the Romans: ‘Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires’ (Romans 13:4). In context the ‘youthful’ passions that Timothy is to avoid include the immature assurance that one is right and the consequent readiness to argue. A desire for novelty may also be included. Paul is calling him to wisdom.

Timothy is to pursue ‘righteousness’, one of Paul’s favourite words, referring as it does to the gift given us by God of a share in God’s own fidelity to who God really is. Paul had the same advice in his first letter to Timothy (1Timothy 6:11), where righteousness, as here, was followed by ‘faith’ (see commentary on Galatians 2:16) and ‘love’ (see commentary on Galatians 5:6). He is to pursue ‘peace’ (see commentary on Galatians 1:3 and Ephesians 2:14). Once again Paul stresses the importance of a purified heart (see 1Timothy 1:5), and urges Timothy to avoid ‘stupid and senseless controversies’ (see 2:16).

He is ‘the Lord’s servant’. He must do the will of the Lord in the Lord’s way. He must also, like the suffering servant of the Lord (see the commentary on Galatians 1:10), not be discouraged by suffering. Modelling himself on Christ, or rather letting Christ live in him, he is to be ‘kindly’ (*ēpios*). We recall Paul’s words to the Thessalonians:

Though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were *gentle* (*ēpios*) among you, like a mother tenderly caring for her own children.

– 1Thessalonians 2:7

He is to be ‘an apt teacher’ (frequently in the Pastoral Epistles), ‘bearing evil without resentment’ (Greek: *anexikakos*), ‘correcting opponents with gentleness’ (*praütēs*; compare Titus 3:2; Galatians 6:1). When Paul himself had need to correct the Corinthians, he wrote: ‘Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?’ (1Corinthians 4:21), and in his second letter, he appealed to them by what is there translated ‘the meekness of Christ’ (2Corinthians 10:1). This is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). Timothy is to do everything he can, through good teaching, to bring about the conversion of those who have been caught in the trap of evil.

²²Shun youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

²³Have nothing to do with stupid and senseless controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.

²⁴And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, bearing evil without resentment [NRSV ‘patient’],

²⁵correcting opponents with gentleness.

God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth,

²⁶and that they may escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

Correct gently

God's correction is always in view of repentance (see 1Timothy 1:20). Religious knowledge is a gift. When correcting error, we must do so in such a way as to attract the person in error to Christ who longs for that person to 'come to know the truth'(see 1Timothy 2:4). The following prayer of Jesus is meant for all, including those who, in their teaching, are deceived and are deceiving others. For the prayer to be fulfilled, repentance – a profound change of mind and heart – is necessary. The Christian leader, acting in accordance with the will of his lord, must do everything to make this possible, while in no way compromising the truth of the gospel

I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy [fits easily], and my burden is light.

– Matthew 11:25-30

Repentance means that we 'change and become like children'(Matthew 18:3). Only Christ's love, revealing the Father, can attract us to such a change. The Christian leader is called to offer correction in this spirit.

In expecting the powers of darkness to put up a desperate effort before being finally vanquished ‘in the last days’, Paul witnesses to the apocalyptic view common among his contemporaries. Already in his second letter to the Thessalonians he wrote:

Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction ... Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you? ... For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work ... and every kind of wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion, leading them to believe what is false.

– 2Thessalonians 2:4-11

In his first letter to Timothy we read:

The Spirit expressly says that in later times some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared with a hot iron.

– 1Timothy 4:1-2

This is consistent with the tradition found also in the synoptic gospels. In Luke, for example, we hear Jesus say:

Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven. But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name.

– Luke 21:10-12

We find the following statement in the first letter of John:

As you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. From this we know that it is the last hour.

– 1John 2:18

¹You must understand this, that in the last days distressing times will come.

**²For people will be
lovers of themselves,
lovers of money,
boasters,
arrogant,
abusive,
disobedient to their
parents,
ungrateful,
unholy,
³inhuman,
implacable,
slanderers,
profligates,
brutes,
haters of good,
⁴treacherous,
reckless,
swollen with conceit,
lovers of pleasure
rather than lovers of
God,
⁵holding to the out-
ward form of godli-
ness but denying its
power.**

Paul has already mentioned that ‘all who are in Asia have turned away from me’ (1:15), and he has been urging Timothy to protect himself against the influence of those who are expounding erroneous teaching (2:16-18, 23-26). He now focuses directly on these teachers, seeing them as part of the ‘distressing times’. Timothy is to expect this, but he is also to know that they will ultimately fail.

We should not miss the pain that lies behind these verses. Paul is not describing the world. He is lamenting the sinfulness that Timothy will find in the church, among those who break faith, or, as he says in the final verse, who ‘hold to the outward form of religion but deny its power’. They have been baptised into the church, but have resisted the power of Christ’s Spirit to transform their lives into lives of holiness. Paul’s picture is purposely black. The tragedy is that he and Timothy can already see within the Christian community elements of what is described here. Such people, if they refuse to repent, are to be ‘avoided’ (kept out of the congregation) lest their corruption ‘spread like gangrene’ (2:17).

The beginning, middle and end of the list set the tone. People will be self-centred, rather than centring their lives on God and on others. They will be ‘unholy’, having no respect for the sacred, and so they will be closed to God and to others, their lives wholly occupied with their own desires. Some of the categories listed here can be found also in the only longer list in Paul’s writings in his letter to the Romans. ‘Boasters’, ‘arrogant’, and ‘disobedient to parents’ are listed together also in Romans 1:30, where they are also followed by ‘inhuman’ (Romans 1:31).

In the opening address of his letter to Titus, Paul spoke of himself as ‘a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of those chosen by God and the knowledge of the truth that is in accordance with godliness’ (Titus 1:1). The ‘outward form of godliness’ is clearly not enough. It can even act as an instrument of self-deception, for it can coexist with the kind of vices just described. True godliness is the fruit of divine power. Timothy is to do all he can to encourage those in his care to open themselves to the purifying power of God’s Spirit who alone can transform us into Christ.

Timothy is told to avoid members of the community who behave in the kinds of ways Paul has just described. He gave the same advice to the Corinthians, explaining that he did not mean immoral people generally, ‘since you would then need to go out of the world’ (1Corinthians 5:10). Jesus ate with sinners and so must his disciples. Furthermore we are to love those caught up in vice, and thus be instruments to them of God’s saving grace. Paul’s concern is for Christians who are in the community but living in the ways described. Such behaviour must be named for what it is, and, if those who are challenged refuse to repent, they must be avoided, which is another way of demanding that they be refused communion. This will limit the contagion. It is hoped that it will also persuade them to change their lives. The community must not pretend that it doesn’t matter.

It seems that certain women were especially vulnerable to the deceit of these false teachers. The teachers whom Paul is condemning were playing on the lack of education of certain women who were enjoying the new found social freedom which they experienced in the church and who were willing to support these charlatan teachers by attending (and paying for?) lecture after lecture, though they were unable to discern that they were learning nothing of value, but were being duped.

Paul likens these men of ‘corrupt mind’ and ‘counterfeit faith’ to Pharaoh’s magicians (Exodus 7:11-12). They are not named in the biblical text, but are called Jannes and Jambres in the Palestinian Aramaic version of the story. Like these magicians, the false teachers are smart at working their ‘magic’, but ‘their folly will become plain to everyone’. Paul is confident in people’s basic good sense and ability, in time, to recognise what is counterfeit. However, Timothy is to do what he can to limit the damage which they can do in the meantime.

^{5b}Avoid them!

⁶For among them are those who make their way into households and captivate silly women, overwhelmed by their sins and swayed by all kinds of desires, ⁷who are always being instructed and can never arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

⁸As Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these people, of corrupt mind and counterfeit faith, also oppose the truth. ,

⁹But they will not make much progress, because, as in the case of those two men, their folly will become plain to everyone.

¹⁰Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith,

my patience, my love, my steadfastness,

¹¹my persecutions and suffering the things that happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra.

What persecutions I endured! Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.

¹²Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

¹³But wicked people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived.

¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it

There is nothing self-centred in Paul's offering himself as an example. He knows full well by whose love and power he has remained faithful. Rather, he is appealing to the bond of affection and faith between himself and Timothy in order to encourage Timothy to remain faithful to his commission. Timothy had lived with Paul, worked with him, and learned from him. Paul's memories go back to the difficulties he had to bear on his first missionary journey, at Antioch (Acts 13:50), Iconium (Acts 14:5), and at Timothy's home town, Lystra (Acts 14:19-20). The stoning Paul suffered at Lystra (2Corinthians 11:25) may well have been witnessed by Timothy as a young lad (see also 1:5). Living a Christian life meant persecution for Paul. As he wrote to the Thessalonians:

When we were with you, we told you beforehand that we were to suffer persecution; so it turned out, as you know.

– 1Thessalonians 3:4

He sees this as necessarily true of everyone who follows Christ. Jesus had said:

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

– Matthew 5:11-12

When Jesus loved he challenged whatever was not true and not just. He was crucified. When Paul carried out the mission given him by Christ, he challenged those who thought of salvation as their privilege. He also challenged much that was unloving in his culture. He is writing from prison and awaiting death because of it.

One cannot expect to take sides with the poor, neglected and powerless against the injustice and abuse of power that oppresses them, without encountering opposition. One who is 'living a religious life in Christ Jesus' is an instrument of Christ's liberating love in the world, and wields enormous power – the power of God. But it is a love-power, and so is powerful to convert, but not to subdue by force one who would resist it.

Though the expression ‘sacred writings’ (*hiera grammata*) is not found in the Old Testament as a way of speaking of the Torah and other writings sacred to the Jews, it is an expression found in Hellenistic Judaism. In his letter to the Romans 1:2, Paul refers to these writings as the ‘holy scriptures’ (*graphai hagiai*).

Though Timothy’s father was not a Jew, and though he was not circumcised as a child (see Acts 16:1-3), his mother had introduced him to the Scriptures. Paul’s statement that they can ‘instruct’ (*sophizō*, ‘make wise’) provides a good balance to his criticism elsewhere of the false use of Scripture (see Titus 1:14; 1Timothy 1:4).

The scriptures are fulfilled in Christ, and so, when read in the light of the faith that is given to us through our communion with Christ, they can guide us to salvation:

Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.

– Romans 15:4

He expands on this thought here. It is God who has sent his Spirit to inspire the writers of the various passages that are read in the synagogue and in the Christian church. If a passage of scripture (*graphē*) is read in the Spirit in which it has been written, we will find in it the inspired wisdom that can be used to teach, to help a sinner to recognise his sin and repent and so be restored to a better life. Scripture can also help us to follow God’s discipline which leads to true righteousness.

Witnessing to their value is the fact that, not only were they accepted by the community as expressing aspects of their communion with God, but they were also copied, treasured and handed on by those who wished their children to know the wonderful things that God had done and was continuing to do in their midst. The community that received, cherished and preserved the scriptures did so because they found them inspiring and because they recognised the truth of their own spiritual experience in them. Paul is constantly quoting from these sacred writings, because of their inherent value and because he wishes to show how the spirituality expressed in them has flowered in Jesus. In his first letter to Timothy, he exhorted him:

Until I arrive, give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching.

– 1Timothy 4:13

¹⁵and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

¹⁶All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

¹⁷so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

¹In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you:

²proclaim the message;

be alert [NRSV 'persistent'] whether the time is favourable or unfavourable;

convince,

rebuke,

and encourage,

with the utmost patience in teaching.

³For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, ⁴and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.

⁵As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

Paul's final exhortation to Timothy opens in an especially solemn way. Everything is placed in the perspective of the day of judgment, the day when Christ the king will reign supreme, when all that is evil will be destroyed and all that is good will be vindicated. We reflected on the 'appearing' (*epiphaneia*) of Christ in commenting on Titus 2:11, and on the 'kingdom' when commenting on 1Thessalonians 2:12. One of the functions of the king was to judge, and so here we have one of the rare occasions when Paul speaks of Christ as judge. Another is in his correspondence with the Corinthians:

All of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.

– 2Corinthians 5:10

The first five imperatives (verse two) sum up the main content of his letter. Like Paul he is to be a herald of the word (see 1:11). He is to be alert to grasp every opportunity to present the good news, even if people do not appear to be open to receive it. He is to point out where people are sinning and alert them to the fact that they must answer for their behaviour. Finally, he is to 'encourage' (*parakaleō*). As pointed out in commenting on 1Thessalonians 2:12, this verb includes a reference to Christ to whose call Timothy is to give voice. Since he is an instrument of Christ he must show the 'utmost patience' of Jesus Christ (1Timothy 1:16).

Paul speaks again of resistance to the truth (verses three and four) and exhorts Timothy to present the Christian message to the church faithfully.

The final four imperatives focus more on Timothy's dedication to his commission. He is to keep a clear head. His ministry will bring suffering to him. He must endure it. He must base all his teaching on the gospel and obediently and fully carry out the ministry given him by Christ, and thus be 'a good servant of Christ Jesus' (1Timothy 4:6).

Whatever the outcome of his present imprisonment, Paul is an old man now and knows that the end is approaching. He sees his life in sacrificial terms, for he has poured himself out, giving his all in the service of his Lord. As he wrote to the Philippians during his previous imprisonment: 'I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith' (Philippians 2:17). Now the cup is nearly empty. The ropes that tie him to this life are losing their grip. His longing 'to depart and be with Christ' (Philippians 1:23) is about to be fulfilled.

In his earlier letter, he declared: 'to this end we toil and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all people' (1Timothy 4:10), and he urged Timothy: 'Fight the good fight of the faith' (1Timothy 6:12). Now with profound humility and gratitude, he can say of himself: 'I have fought the good fight'.

To the Philippians, he wrote:

It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labour in vain.

– Philippians 2:16

Beloved, I do not consider that I have made the goal my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

– Philippians 3:13-14

Now he can say: 'I have finished the race.' He wrote to the Corinthians: 'It is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy' (1Corinthians 4:2). Looking back over thirty years of missionary endeavour, he can say: 'I have kept the faith'. He has not betrayed the trust placed in him by Christ. He has been faithful to his commission, and he has been faithful to his personal consecration to Christ his Lord. His life is conformed to that of Christ also in his dying which, like that of Christ, is to be a self-giving sacrifice, offered in love for the world for whose salvation he has spent himself. He is suffering for the gospel (1:8; 2:9), and he is soon to offer his life in the same cause.

Christ will appear at the parousia and, faithful to his word, will draw all who have longed for him into the fullness of divine communion. This is Paul's hope and trust.

⁶As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come.

⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

⁸From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

⁹Do your best to come to me soon,

¹⁰for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica;

Crescens has gone to Galatia [or 'Gaul'],

Titus to Dalmatia.

¹¹Only Luke is with me.

Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful in my ministry.

¹²I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus.

¹³When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments.

¹⁴Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will pay him back for his deeds.

¹⁵You also must beware of him, for he strongly opposed our message.

We met Demas in Ephesus, where he was with Paul when he wrote to Philemon (verse 24) and to the community in Colossae (Colossians 4:14). He has deserted Paul and gone to Thessalonica. Perhaps he considered being with Paul to be too dangerous.

This is the only time we here of Crescens. The Greek '*Galatia*' was used both for Galatia and Gaul. If Paul did make a missionary journey into Spain after his first detention in Rome, it is possible that the reference here is to Gaul.

In Paul's letter to Titus he asked him to meet him in Nicopolis (Titus 3:12), a coastal city in the Roman Province of Dalmatia (southern Illyricum). It would appear that he stayed on to carry on his missionary work there.

Mark is somewhere where Timothy can pick him up on the journey to Rome which Paul urges him to take. The only one of Paul's close companions to be with him is Luke. The close contact between Paul and both Luke and Mark (see also Philemon 24 and Colossians 4:14) has interesting implications in regard to the relationship between the gospels of Mark and Luke, and also in regard to Paul's influence on the writing of the Gospels.

Tychicus was the carrier of both Colossians (4:7) and Ephesians (6:21). Paul planned on sending him to replace Titus in Crete (Titus 3:12). He is now on his way to Ephesus, perhaps to replace Timothy while Timothy joins Paul in Rome, or, if Timothy has already left Ephesus, to take his place there.

Alexander is probably the same man as was mentioned in Paul's first letter to Timothy (1:20). Was he responsible for turning Paul over to the authorities and having him back in prison on trial? Whatever harm he has caused, Paul is warning Timothy to be careful of him.

The reference to a 'first defence' is probably to a preliminary investigation of the case brought against Paul. He was without support and obviously the case was not dismissed but put off for a later hearing which Paul is awaiting. Hence his being in prison. There is an interesting connection between Paul's readiness to forgive and the attitude of Stephen at his martyrdom on the occasion of our first meeting of Saul: 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them' (Acts 7:60).

Years before, Paul had written: 'It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, loving me and giving himself for me' (Galatians 2:20). His life was the life of Christ living in him; so too is his dying. As Jesus was betrayed, deserted, and left alone, so is Paul. As Jesus witnessed to the truth before a human tribunal, so does Paul. As Jesus entrusted himself to God, so does Paul. As Jesus pardoned those responsible, so does Paul.

There are a number of allusions to Psalm 22 in the account of the suffering and death of Jesus, and the Psalm can be read with profit as we contemplate Christ on the cross. There are a number of allusions to it also in this passage ('Save me from the mouth of the lion!', Psalm 22:21), and we can draw profit from reading it prayerfully as we think of Paul languishing in prison.

Christ continues the mission given to him from the Father through Paul and Timothy and through those who will carry on after them:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

– Matthew 28:18-20

To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

¹⁶At my first defence no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them!

¹⁷But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

¹⁸The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom.

To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

**¹⁹Greet Prisca and Aquila,
and the household of Onesiphorus.**

²⁰Erastus remained in Corinth;

Trophimus I left ill in Miletus.

²¹Do your best to come before winter.

Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers and sisters.

²²The Lord be with your spirit.

Grace be with you.

Prisca and Aquila (see the commentary on Romans 16:3) have been involved in ministry ever since Paul first met them about 25 years earlier in Corinth (Acts 18:2). They were among those expelled from Rome by decree of the emperor. They left Corinth with Paul and were with him in Ephesus when Paul wrote his first letter from there to Corinth (1Corinthians 16:19), but were back in Rome when he wrote to the community there in early 57AD. Now, perhaps ten years later they are back in the east.

Onesiphorus has already been mentioned in praise earlier in the letter (1:16-18). It is likely that the Erastus mentioned here is the Erastus who was the city treasurer in Corinth (Romans 16:23). It is perhaps he who, along with Timothy, is mentioned as one of the helpers whom Paul sent on from Ephesus to Macedonia (Acts 19:22).

Trophimus was the Ephesian delegate responsible for the collection that Paul had organised for the poor in Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). He was a Gentile and was the reason for the trouble Paul found himself in when he was in Jerusalem when the crowd 'presumed that Paul had taken him into the temple'(Acts 21:29).

Eubulus, Pudens and Claudia are not mentioned elsewhere. Tradition tells us that Linus was the first leader of the church in Rome after the death of Peter (see Irenaeus *Adversus Haereses*, III,3,3).

It was because the Lord was with Paul that he could say 'I have kept the faith'(4:7). It is only through the Lord's presence and life-giving Spirit that Timothy can continue the task of preaching the word and teaching with the persistent and unfailing love of Christ. And so it is that Paul concludes his final words to Timothy, with a prayer that the Lord be with him. The 'your' in 'your spirit' is in the singular. However, the 'you' in 'Grace be with you' is plural. Paul broadens out his greeting to include all those who are with Timothy, praying that he and the whole Christian community may experience the gracious gift of redemption, life and salvation that God wishes for all in Christ.

Clement speaks of Paul's martyrdom in a letter written from Rome at the end of the first century:

Owing to envy, Paul also obtained the reward of patient endurance, after being seven times thrown into captivity, compelled to flee, and stoned. After preaching both in the east and west, he gained the illustrious reputation due to his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world, and come to the extreme limit of the west, and suffered martyrdom under the prefects. Thus was he removed from the world, and went into the holy place, having proved himself a striking example of patience.

– 1Clement 1.5

The 'extreme limit of the west' has been interpreted as a reference to Spain. It is possible that Paul did fulfil his dream and that he headed to Spain upon his release from custody in Rome. This would have meant going into an area where Greek was not the common language. If he did in fact go to Spain, problems of communication may have been enough to convince him to cut this mission short and return to his earlier mission fields in the east.

Ignatius of Antioch in the opening years of the second century also speaks of Paul's martyrdom (*To the Ephesians*, 12), as does Tertullian in his *Prescriptions against Heresy* (36.3). In his *History of the Church*, composed in the early years of the fourth century, Eusebius writes of Paul's release from prison and of his martyrdom:

After defending himself, the Apostle was again sent on the ministry of preaching, and coming a second time to the same city [Rome] suffered martyrdom under Nero. During this imprisonment he wrote the Second Epistle to Timothy, indicating at the same time that his first defence had taken place and that his martyrdom was at hand ...

It is recorded that Paul was beheaded in Rome itself, and that Peter likewise was crucified under Nero. This account of Peter and Paul is substantiated by the fact that their names are preserved in the cemeteries of that place even to the present day. It is confirmed likewise by Caius, a member of the Church, who arose under Zephyrinus, bishop of Rome. He, in a published disputation with Proclus, the leader of the Phrygian heresy, speaks as follows concerning the places where the sacred corpses of the aforesaid apostles are laid: 'But I can show the trophies of the apostles. For if you will go to the Vatican or to the Ostian way, you will find the trophies of those who laid the foundations of this church.' And that they both suffered martyrdom at the same time is stated by Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, in his epistle to the Romans, in the following words: 'You have thus by such an admonition bound together the planting of Peter and of Paul at Rome and Corinth. For both of them planted and likewise taught us in our Corinth. And they taught together in like manner in Italy, and suffered martyrdom at the same time.'

– *History of the Church*, 2.22; 2.25.5