

SLOW PAUL: THINKING THROUGH 2 TIMOTHY

For an introduction to the so-called 'Pastoral' letters, see *Slow Paul: 1 Timothy*. John Stott defends the tradition that the apostle Paul was indeed the author of this letter, and sets out the likely series of events between the end of Paul's imprisonment in about AD 62 (CE) and his re-arrest and execution in the mid-sixties. The personal references and travel instructions at the end of the letter are obscure, perhaps deliberately so; it has been conjectured that the bringing together of Paul, Luke, Mark and certain priceless documents is no accident – is this evidence that the formation of at least two of the gospels was well on the way and urgently needed to be completed? For an account of what 'Slow Paul' is trying to do, please see the Introduction to *Slow Paul: Colossians*.

Helpful commentaries include John Stott *The Message of 2 Timothy* (BST 1973); William Barclay *The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (Daily Study Bible revised ed 1975); Tom Wright *Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Letters* (SPCK 2003).

1:1-2 ¹ *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,* ² *To Timothy, my dear son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.*

It's Paul again

[1:1-2] Is that my much-loved child Timothy? Yes, it's Paul again, still serving, still hoping. God hasn't yet made me redundant; he's kept me on as an apostle, every day fresh with instructions from my Master Jesus, every slow dawn a reminder of that endless morning of life awaiting me and every true believer in the Lord Christ. He has promised, and he will deliver; there's nothing to be afraid of. My title-deeds to the kingdom are lodged securely in the keeping of the King.

I greet you, as I greeted you before, with God the Father's triple blessing written in the royal script, signed personally by his Son: may you be sustained by his undying love and unlimited strength; may you stand up confident in his forgiving friendship; may your heart be steady in the serenity of knowing that he shoulders all your cares.

1:3-5 ³ *I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.* ⁴ *Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy.* ⁵ *I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.*

Memories are precious

[1:3] I've been thinking: families are so important, aren't they? I can look back along my family tree and find men and women faithfully serving the Lord according to the light granted to them, scrupulously concerned to live upright lives and to walk humbly with their God. That's what I've always tried to do myself – God knows how it tipped over into such grievous fanaticism – and I'm so grateful when I see the same passion for the Lord in someone like you. It certainly helps my prayers for you to stay fresh and hopeful. [1:4] Our last parting was quite emotional, wasn't it! But it needn't be the last time we're going to see each other; in fact, I'm desperate to get you over here – I'd be over the moon if you could manage that. Believe me, you're not just on my regular prayer list; whether I'm trying to fill my daylight hours with positive thoughts, or during the watches of the night when I wake up shivering and forebodings crowd in on me, my thoughts swing back to you, wondering how you're getting on, interceding for you in your work at Ephesus, just wishing I could enjoy the fellowship we've always had.

[1:5] Yes, memories are precious. There's always been a single-minded quality about your faith, and a hunger for God which couldn't stand pious posturing or religious play-acting. I trace these characteristics back to the female members of your family, first your wonderful grandma Lois with her deep wisdom and godly bearing, and then of course your mum Eunike who battled with her own difficulties so courageously and managed against all the odds to bring you up in her Jewish tradition. I know you've had your times of doubt and despair, but I'm absolutely certain that you will come through all the testing, because I know you will never, ever let go of what is so fundamental to you.

1:6-7 ⁶ For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷ For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

Gifts-in-relationship

[1:6] This is why I want to write to you, because I'm all too familiar with the experience you're going through, of the fires of the spirit burning low and wondering what you can do to revive them. Let me take you back to the day when we held the service of commissioning for your ministry in Ephesus, and I laid my hands on your head and prayed that God would give you all the gifts you needed for this demanding task. You may or may not have felt anything dramatic happening at the time, but when God bestows his blessings, he doesn't take them away again five minutes later. What he does insist upon, however, is that the gifts aren't mechanical or automatic, they are gifts-in-relationship, and they need working at by the recipient. I used the metaphor of fire just now, and you won't need telling that when the flame in the hearth is dying down, you don't just sit there and watch it flicker out, you feed it with the appropriate amount of fuel and nurse it back to full strength.

[1:7] I'm talking, of course, about our relationship with the Holy Spirit, who not only seals our union with the Lord Jesus when we first come to him in faith, but transmits all God's subsequent gifts to us. One of those gifts is courage. Remember how the Lord taught the apostles about the Spirit and in the same breath told them they would never need to be afraid of anything ever again? We may not *feel* particularly courageous, but we tell him we're up for anything as long as he's there, and we find a new strength, not necessarily a demonstration of miraculous powers, but the ability to go the second mile, to survive storms of temptation, to provide a helping hand to someone in need. We find we can love people we don't particularly like, and forgive those who have deliberately wounded us. We don't go into a blind panic when we're making decisions, but manage to operate with a calm rationality that surprises even ourselves. And so on. Nourish this relationship with the Spirit. Tell him you want to go on with him, whatever the cost. And he will honour your prayers, your pleading of his promises, your tears of desperation.

1:8 ⁸ So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.

Taking a stand for Christ

[1:8] If you and the Spirit are in this kind of intimate partnership together, people are going to realise that there's something different about you, and they'll start making remarks or even asking questions. This almost never happens when you're expecting it, and the natural tendency is to clam up and go back into one's shell, muttering 'Now's not the time to explain' or changing the subject. Well, you may never get another chance with that particular person or group, so why not make the most of it? You haven't got to convert them on the spot – but neither have you got to do a Simon Peter and disclaim your faith! You can quietly admit to being one of those crazy Christ-followers, and simply say that it means a lot to you. The way may or may not open up for you to have an in-

depth conversation about the Lord; but at least you've opened a window of enquiry for those who are curious or hungry enough to get a glimpse of him.

Of course, they may find out that you've been associated with me, and they may ask you why I've been rearrested. I imagine, incidentally, that you know I'm back in Rome under lock and key. The authorities here are actively hunting down Christians and even putting them to death in various horrible ways; and this could become general all over the Empire. The point I'm making is that if you identify with the name of Jesus, you will hardly be seen as a public benefactor. In fact you're more likely to be strung up on a cross and set alight to entertain the crowds. There's a hate campaign against us, and that's so ironic because the Jesus we preach is the Lord of love. I'll say a bit more about this before I reach the end of the letter; what I'm trying to get across is that if we take a stand for Christ and get persecuted for it, it doesn't mean the Lord has abandoned us – he's still firmly in control, and he's there by our side to help us through whatever we're called to suffer for him.

So there's no point in hiding your light under a bushel or scuttling away into the shadows in a desperate bid to stay respectable. Step up to the mark and take whatever comes; be proud of belonging to the King, and let the Spirit give you a boldness you never knew you had.

1:9-10 ⁹ *He has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,* ¹⁰ *but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

God is the great Giver

[1:9] It's such a relief, this sense of belonging. You and I share it with all believers everywhere. We were being swept out to sea and would have sunk without trace, if this God of ours hadn't reached down and pulled us out. If this sounds too dramatic, let me put it another way. We were listening to seductive voices luring us from the highway of obedience to God's will, but then there came another voice cutting through our drugged senses and insistently urging us back on track, back in the direction of our true heavenly home. Typically, we started thinking it had something to do with our own uprightness, the efforts we made to resist the temptations of the world – but of course this was to yield to the subtlest temptation of all, that of religious pride. No, this rescue operation was mounted by a God who loved us too much to let us go on the ash-heap; and this love wasn't a sudden whim, it had been blazing steadily since before the dawn of creation, before space and time came into being. We may think it was all down to our own decision, but in a strange way, as soon as we reached out our hand to Christ, we found our own name written on the palms of his hands.

[1:10] You see, God is the great Giver, and we've been too blind to see it. He wanted us to share his glory right from the beginning, but somehow we thought the whole thing was a trap; the only thing that could bring us to our senses was a personal visit from the King, putting on the working clothes of an ordinary human being, running a repair workshop for broken souls. If it was going to mean that he, Jesus, was going to be broken on a hideous cross, then he was fully prepared for that. It turned, as you know, into a final struggle with Death itself, and there could be only one Victor. This Lord of ours took the entire human race through the darkness and out into the light, so that we could enjoy his own imperishable and glorious life. If that isn't something to shout about, I don't know what is.

1:11-12 ¹¹ *And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. ¹² That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.*

Rock-solid

[1:11] But the solemn truth is that if you and I don't shout about it, people aren't going to realise what's happened. When the light blazed into my own pitch-black night on the Damascus road, the first thing the Lord did was to commission me to open other people's eyes as well. It didn't matter how far from the truth they were, I was to go where he sent me and stand up in market-places and synagogues telling them what God had done, and not just telling them once but making sure they knew it so well that they could pass it on in their turn. [1:12] Of course some of them didn't like it and tried to shut me up, which is why I'm back in this stinking Roman dungeon being manhandled and humiliated like any common criminal. But what does earthly disgrace matter if the Lord's on my side? When you hit rock-bottom, you find out how solid your Rock really is, and how dependable he's been all along.

It's as though he's telling me, 'Paul, I entrusted my commission to you, this precious ministry of reconciliation. Now the time has come for you to hand it back to me for safe-keeping. All the speeches you've made, all the souls you've won, all the churches you've founded – leave them with me. I know what I've been doing, and one day you're going to know too. You're going to find out what I've really achieved through you.'

1:13-14 ¹³ *What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.*

Unchanging story

[1:13-14] Word and Spirit. The Word in our mouths and the Spirit in our hearts. The Word that heals and the Spirit who safeguards. When the doctor writes out a prescription for you, you keep it in a safe place and make sure you follow it exactly. Now the gospel isn't a rigid formula that you apply to everyone regardless of their situation, it's the unique touch of the finger of God on this person's point of need, my precise condition. However, we all without exception have the same basic condition, the infection of sin, the virus of self-worship; and you've heard countless times from my mouth the sole effective remedy, the cross of Christ Jesus. The cross shows us how utterly trustworthy he is and how far he is prepared to go in his love for us. This potion may taste strange and bitter as you swallow it (as indeed it was for him), but it's the one essential source of healing for all the world's evil.

Pass on the unchanging story of the cross. It's the best thing in the world. It's the surest way to understanding the heart of God. And the Holy Spirit, God's emissary who has taken up permanent residence in your midst, is right there ceaselessly patrolling the walls, dealing with enemy agents, issuing instructions for the day. All I ask is that you work with him and not against him.

1:15-18 ¹⁵ *You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes. ¹⁶ May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. ¹⁷ On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. ¹⁸ May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus.*

Outstanding exception

[1:15] Speaking of which, I've heard (and of course you will be well aware of this) that there's a mass movement over in your province of Asia of anti-Pauline feeling. I can understand this, because they

don't want to be associated with someone who's on his way to execution – suppose the police came for them and their families? All the same, I do feel a little betrayed, particularly when fine Christians like Phygelus and Hermogenes are quoted as saying that they can now see what rubbish my teaching was all along. This really hurts – and it can't be making things any easier for you either. [1:16] The outstanding exception has been that crazy man Onesiphorus. I'm praying that the Lord will protect his family in these difficult circumstances. He and they were such a blessing to me on the many occasions I stayed with them, giving me plenty to eat and drink after a long and demanding journey and just helping me to relax. [1:17] I couldn't believe it when he turned up in Rome! He said nobody would tell him where I was being held, so he'd had to do a lot of detective work, then of course there was the problem of bribing the guards to let him into that awful hole they threw me into. He walked in as perky as ever, made a few jokes about the rats and the damp straw, and gave me a great big hug. He wasn't the slightest bit deterred by my woebegone appearance, nor by the probability of his being arrested as soon as he showed his face in daylight. [1:18] I know a lot of people couldn't believe he really was a Christian believer, but luckily there's only one person in charge of Judgment Day, and that's the Lord Jesus himself. I've been praying (as I think we're allowed to) that the Master will honour what was genuine in his faith, and will count his benefactions to me in his favour. No-one knows better than you what loyal support he gave me during those terrible days in Ephesus. Such a character!

2:1-2 ¹ *You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.* ² *And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.*

The message travels on

[2:1] Yes, things are getting decidedly difficult for committed Christians. No surprise there, as Barnabas would have said. You are so special to me, Timothy – I just want you to stay close to Christ and to draw continually on the inner strength he gives day by day. I may be hundreds of miles away, but he's right there with you, putting his limitless reserves of heaven-given energy into action at the merest whisper of your pleas for help. Don't ever think you have somehow to prove that you're adequate to his demands or that you qualify for his affection. Big mistake! He loves you whatever, and he'll work through you regardless. I know.

[2:2] My voice will soon be silenced, but the message travels on. You can play a part in this. You've had to put up with listening to me more than most have, but if you should ever doubt or forget what I've been saying for the last thirty years, there are plenty of others who won't have done, and who by their lives and testimonies (some made even more powerful by their deaths) will witness to the truth of the gospel I have served. The next generation, and the ones after that, must know about the love of Christ – and the best way of ensuring that is to train up men and women to continue the process. Choose them carefully. They've got to be people you can really trust; and they've got to have that special quality of communication, that passionate conviction that what they're telling you is the best news in the world and here's how you can step inside the story of Jesus.

2:3-4 ³ *Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.* ⁴ *No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer.*

On campaign

[2:3-4] Here are three little pictures of the kind of whole-hearted commitment the Lord honours. Firstly, we are soldiers of Christ. You don't join the army to have a cushy life. You know the enemy is going to throw everything at you, so you train in order to survive the maximum perils and discomforts. While you're on campaign, you don't try to run a business or stand for political office – you keep your mind one hundred-per-cent on the job. I'm not saying Christians shouldn't involve

themselves in the affairs of normal life – the Master wants us right in there, in the thick of the fight. What I am saying is that we should be prepared to put up with all kinds of hardship, if only to show our devotion and loyalty to him; he went to hell and back for us, and now he's chosen us to wear his uniform and serve in his regiment. Are we going to let him down by opting out at the first whiff of danger?

2:5 ⁵ *Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules.*

Long-distance race

[2:5] Next picture: the athlete. The Christian life isn't a short sprint, it's a long-distance race, and the temptation is to take short cuts to make the course easier. Sorry, but you've got to stay on the track marked out for you, otherwise you'll simply be disqualified when you get to the finishing-line. It doesn't matter how impressive a figure you cut while you're running past the cheering crowds; if you break the rules, you're not going to be standing on the podium with a laurel crown on your head. Again, I'm not saying that followers of Christ who mess up or who crack under pressure can't be picked up and restored to full working order – we know how amazing his grace is. My point is that we're in it for the long haul, and even if the track runs uphill all the way, that's the one we're going to have to follow.

2:6-7 ⁶ *The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.* ⁷ *Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.*

Harvest rewards

[2:6] My last illustration is from arable farming. This is definitely not a part-time occupation. You start work well before dawn, you toil away through all but the hottest hours of the day, you come home as the last light fades – all because you know that without your unremitting labour and attention the fruit is going to wither on the trees or the grain isn't going to get harvested. Then let's imagine the lord of your estate says, 'Sorry, but all these crops are for my use and profit; you and your family can starve.' Well, even in earthly terms this would be totally unjust; in Christ's kingdom it is unthinkable. His rewards are way out of proportion to our efforts. Doesn't it make sense, then, to put our backs into the work the Lord gives us, if only as a kind of advance sign of gratitude for the colossal bonanza we know is coming?

[2:7] All this picture-language may seem trite or obvious, but I hope you won't dismiss it out of hand. The implications for your ministry need prayerful working through with the Lord. Get apart with him and ask him to show you how you can be more faithful and productive in his service. He has promised his guidance in abundance. Don't just be content to know his will in theory; apply it in practice.

2:8-10 ⁸ *Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel,* ⁹ *for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained.* ¹⁰ *Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.*

Priorities

[2:8] Keep your priorities clear. Fix your eyes upon Jesus. Constantly remind yourself of the actual Messiah-King God chose to reveal: not a celestial figure appearing at the end of time, not an avenging conqueror putting human enemies to flight, but a dead man coming to life again, bringing hope out of despair and new beginnings out of the finality of the grave. Jesus fulfils all the

prophecies about a successor of David arising from the royal line who would be greater even than David. This isn't some kind of fantasy pipe-dream, it has really happened in our time, and it is the centrepiece of the good tidings I bring.

[2:9] Inevitably there will be those who don't see it as good tidings at all, and whose response to this message is to beat me senseless, throw me into jail, treat me as a common criminal and do everything they can to get rid of me. Well, perhaps they'll finally succeed – but they will never be able to silence the voice of God, which travels through the thickest prison walls and reverberates freely to the ends of the earth, summoning those who will listen out of the slumber of sin and the darkness of death. [2:10] God is gathering a people for his own glory; and that's why I'm prepared to put up with every conceivable affliction, because however many have already been gathered in, there will always be more folk out there who need to meet the Lord Jesus and to find deliverance in him. My job, our job as kingdom messengers will only be finished when the full number have streamed in through the gates of the heavenly city and started tasting the unending royal banquet set out for them.

2:11-13 ¹¹ Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; ¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; ³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

Standing the test

[2:11] As I said, the atmosphere in Rome has been unpleasant for Christians for some time now and may well get worse. When Christians are facing a painful death for their faith they need a really solid word to hang on to. A little saying or spiritual song has been going round our house-churches which has put determination into a lot of wavering souls:

'Jesus died once, and if we share his death,
we'll share his living resurrection breath;
[2:12] all who have stood the test and courage shown
will reign supreme with Jesus on his throne.
Fail to confess him, find eternal shame:
what if the Master fails to know your name?
[2:13] Losing your faith, you lose much more besides;
cling to the Rock who firm and sure abides.
Our God has promised – will he change his mind?
Trust Jesus' love, and leave your fears behind!'

Not the greatest poetry in the world, but if it keeps their minds on Jesus who is Lord, that's the vital thing.

2:14-15 ¹⁴ Keep reminding God's people of these things. Warn them before God against quarrelling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. ¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

Consummate craftsman

[2:14] And that's your job, too: to keep people's eyes fixed on Jesus. If they need reminding once, they'll need reminding a thousand times. Like the prophets of old, who stood in the presence of God and witnessed to his living power despite everything thrown at them by the opposition, your commission is to bring God's people the word of God. If you have to tell them to stop quibbling over shades of meaning and quoting authorities against each other, which isn't only a complete waste of time but actually undoes all the patient hours of teaching you've given them – well, that's

par for the course. [2:15] You're not subject to human opinions, you're only after one thing, and that is the boss's approval, the 'well done, good and faithful servant' from the Master's own mouth. He was a consummate craftsman himself, and no-one ever sent back a piece of his that was shoddily put together. He knew how to cut a simple, straight line, working with the grain of the wood, all the joints fitting perfectly with each other. That's a little parable for your teaching: make sure it dovetails into Scripture on the one hand, and into your hearers' needs on the other. What will save their souls isn't your pet theories on this or that, it's the word of God, revealed to the mind and hidden in the heart.

2:16-18 ¹⁶ *Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.* ¹⁷ *Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus,* ¹⁸ *who have departed from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some.*

Pet theories

[2:16] Of course, there are plenty of pet theories going the rounds – I can vividly recall the Ephesus scene where spirituality is such a hot topic. And spiritualism, voices from the dead and all that claptrap. It sounds so impressive, but it leads people away from God rather than to him. It simply confirms its devotees in a kind of pseudo-religion that is a substitute for the real thing and usually ends in their abandoning Christ entirely. Have no truck with it (I think I said something like this in my earlier letter).

Have you ever seen gangrene at work, devouring living tissues, creeping up the body until death results? My point is that these people's 'spiritual insights' are not only hollow, they are actually destructive. I gather you are still having problems with our old friend Hymenaeus and someone called Philetus; well, they are a case in point. They have spiritualised away the whole doctrine of Resurrection on which our faith depends! First they say that Jesus didn't physically rise from the dead – his bones are still somewhere in Palestine (well, produce them then!) – what lives on is the power of his example, or something. Then they apply this to the universal Awakening from the dead, so clearly taught in Scripture and by the Lord himself, when our lives come up for assessment before God. They have taken a precious truth – that believers in Jesus will never be judged for their sins, because he has dealt with them on the cross – and turned it into a pernicious error, that it doesn't matter what we do with our bodies, because we are now 'spiritual beings' and immune to sin. It's like an archer claiming a bulls-eye when his arrow has clean missed the target and hit some unfortunate spectator instead. I wish I could say that nobody is going to be affected; but the fact is that some folks' faith is unstable enough to be capsized by crosswinds of this kind.

2:19 ¹⁹ *Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, 'Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.'*

Double substructure

[2:19] Look, Timothy, I know you're scared that the whole church is going to be undermined by these heretical teachers. No! The house that God is building for himself is based on far firmer foundations than that – it's based on the cornerstone that God always intended to be laid, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. The architect has personally selected this very foundation-stone and has set it unalterably in place, stamping his own authoritative signature upon it. Don't be surprised, though, if headstrong people try to query the uniqueness of Christ. Remember how Moses and Aaron faced such a situation in the rebellion by the sons of Korah: it wasn't only their leadership that was being challenged, it was the authority of Jehovah himself. What does God give Moses to say? 'It's not for you to decide who are God's special people, his royal priesthood, his own possession. God is the one who chooses exactly who are going to belong to him.' And of course we

know what happened to those rebels. The people were told to separate themselves from the sons of Korah and the judgment fell.

So it's not your personal authority that is being challenged, it's God's. In response you can stand firm on two things: (1) when it's a question of who truly belongs to the Lord, it's not up to you to decide, it's his business; and he will call each one unmistakably into his precious friendship. (2) Once you know who the Lord is and what he's really like, and once you declare your allegiance to him alone, you don't even begin to think of any compromise with the spirit of disobedience. Lock the whole building into this double substructure; make sure your whole life and thinking is tied into Christ as the foundation-granite. That kind of church can never fall.

2:20-21 ²⁰ *In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use.* ²¹ *Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.*

If it's dirty it's useless

[2:20] Let's turn from the foundations to the house built upon them. Imagine a lofty mansion owned by a nobleman. The first thing you think of is all the gold candelabras, silver dinner services, expensive furniture and mosaic floors; but there are also ranges of less impressive equipment, wooden implements, everyday earthenware and so on. The great man needs one kind of receptacle to drink his wine out of and another kind to relieve himself into. Now I could make the point that in any church fellowship there are some who do the up-front stuff and take most of the limelight, whereas there are others, equally indispensable, who quietly get on with the routine business of making the thing work. [2:21] But that's not quite what I'm on about. I've experienced church after church in which things go wrong with the up-front types: personalities clash, little cliques start forming. What the Lord needs in these situations is men and women who are going to stay faithful to him through thick and thin. People who discern where the rot is setting in and who will have nothing to do with it. Here are two piles of crockery and cutlery, one needing washing up, and the other clean and ready for use. Which lot do you think the Master is going to want on his dinner table? It doesn't matter how expensive or fashionable the item is; if it's dirty, it's useless. So you must appeal to everybody to stay faithful to their essential faith in Christ. Can the Lord use them? Are they cleansed and consecrated, ready for whatever he calls them to do? Their contribution may not be flashy, but it may save the day – and at the final reckoning it will be honoured.

2:22 ²² *Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*

Going against the flow

[2:22] Yes indeed, consecration. You're still comparatively young, and I'm going to say something which may not apply to you personally, but which is relevant to all church leaders under the age of eighty. It's about sexual temptation. We live in an age and in a society where it is taken for granted that young people should be encouraged to gratify their urges and form close physical relationships. How is someone like you going to go against the flow?

Firstly, you should say a definite 'no' to what you sense to be wrong. Take Joseph, for instance, when he was approached by Potiphar's wife; he got out of the house as fast as he could, because he knew he would be sinning against God. Put distance between yourself and the temptation. But not only that. You've got to say 'no' to sin, but you've got to say 'yes' to Jesus as well. In other words, deliberately concentrate on the goals set for you by Scripture. Aim first and foremost to be completely right with God, having nothing on your conscience and walking in close fellowship with

him. Tell yourself that faith involves faithfulness: you can't tell other people to believe in Christ while you're leading a double life yourself. This doesn't mean you've got to be a cold fish; in fact, it sets you free to love the unlovely more genuinely and sacrificially. Set your heart on being a peacemaker, reconciling animosities, dissolving jealousies, uniting factions.

Do you get my point? Resistance by itself is unlikely to get very far – what's needed is a powerful counter-attraction. And I'll tell you what: you'll find others who are having to make the same choices. They're probably the people who turn up most regularly to prayer meetings. The fellowship of the forgiven. Desire for God's will to be done is the product of a clear conscience and a longing to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Young people are sometimes the most passionate pray-ers.

2:23-26 ²³ Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. ²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. ²⁵ Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

Winning the argument or representing Christ?

[2:23] To return to my earlier point about pet theories and speculative wild-goose chases, my advice is, don't get drawn into them. You know the kind of thing: empty-headed assertions about angels, or pseudo-scientific blather about 'spiritual reality'. You'll only find yourself getting hot under the collar and pontificating about what are mere matters of personal opinion. [2:24] You're not there to win arguments, you're there to represent Christ, and you won't do that by losing your temper and calling people names. Your attitude should be one of personal humility and sweet reasonableness, making a case for what you believe, yes, but not point-scoring, and certainly not taking offence if you're rubbished or insulted. The Lord once described himself as 'gentle in heart': this didn't mean letting his opponents walk all over him, but it did mean bringing people face to face with the truth in a way that didn't make them look total idiots.

You should always proceed on the one-in-a-hundred chance that God could work a miracle in these fanatical opponents, and cause them to do a complete U-turn. After all, he did it for me. He brought me into direct personal contact with the truth by meeting me in the Jesus I was persecuting. I wasn't argued into faith by a series of abstract propositions – I was loved into surrender by a crucified and living Saviour. [2:26] I realise now that all the time I thought I was serving the One True God, I was in reality being an agent of his deadliest enemy.

The devil's tactics are simple, and devastatingly effective. He rocks you to sleep (I'm talking in spiritual terms) and then binds you hand and foot, whether with silken threads or manacles of steel. When you're helpless in his grasp, rather than killing you off straightaway he lets you out on a short leash to wreak his havoc in your particular bit of the world. That's why I said it takes a divine miracle for anyone to become a Christian. And it's our patient and stubborn witness to what God is really like that can prepare the ground for that miracle.

3:1-5 ¹ But mark this: there will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.

Human nature hasn't changed

[3:1] Don't ever begin to think it's going to be easy. You may be tempted to assume that as the time draws ever closer to our Lord's return, the church is going to win increasingly sweeping victories. Not a bit of it! From Pentecost to Parousia the story is the same, because human nature hasn't changed one iota. [3:2] I've jotted down a number of characteristics of the unregenerate person which add up to a totally depressing snapshot of mankind. Remember I'm talking in spiritual terms, because there are features of human character which still retain traces of our noble origin in the image of God. But the old saying holds true: 'when the best gets corrupted, it turns into the worst.'

We make ourselves into little gods, rather than loving God who is the source of our being.

Making money for ourselves becomes our pet obsession, when we could do so much good by distributing it to people in greater need than we are.

We talk up our own achievements instead of waiting for others to give us the credit.

We assume our own superiority and dismiss others' claims to merit.

We insult people to their face and gossip away their reputation behind their backs.

From our youth we have disregarded our parents' warnings and blatantly contravened their instructions.

We haven't the decency to say 'thank you' either to God for his goodness or to people who go out of their way to help us.

Towards the things of God we are irreverent or even profane.

[3:3] We lose patience with people and break off relationships when it suits us.

We nurse grudges and refuse to forgive those we consider have wronged us.

We talk up the failings of others and pounce upon their slightest derelictions.

We so easily lose our self-control under provocation.

We can be really brutal to those we are in a position to bully.

We don't look for good in others – we prefer to see only the bad.

[3:4] We are disloyal to our friends and are quite happy to let them down when it suits us.

We form hasty judgments and are quick to condemn on insufficient evidence.

We preen ourselves on our virtues and have an exaggerated estimate of our own importance.

We live for our own comfort and pleasure rather than for the will of God.

We profess religious devotion, and yet our lives show little trace of the spiritual power of true goodness. (Be especially wary of the last category: pious hypocrites are worse than out-and-out scoundrels.)

3:6-7 ⁶ *They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires,* ⁷ *always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.*

Charlatan missionaries

[3:6] I've probably overstated my case – I'm just trying to say that human nature was intended to be such a beautiful thing, yet how ugly it can be when it gets twisted. This is as true within the church as it is in the outside world. Why, I've even heard of so-called 'Bible students' who knock on people's doors, carefully choosing a time when they know the man of the household is out to work, and draw gullible young women into the spider's web of their fellowship. They pick attractive females who are probably having some clandestine affair or other, or at any rate feel a sense of dissatisfaction or guilt about their lifestyle, even as they buy yet another piece of designer clothing or flirt helplessly with the new man in their lives. [3:7] Adulthood hasn't brought these women true maturity; they're still lost little girls inside, not knowing what they believe or why they're so unhappy. They are a perfect prey for these charlatan missionaries who know exactly how to manipulate them into their perverted brand of Christianity.

3:8-9 ⁸ Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these teachers oppose the truth. They are men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. ⁹ But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.

Twisted motives

[3:8] The classic confrontation between falsehood and truth, of course, is in the story of Moses and Aaron and the sorcerers of Egypt. Moses' power to work miracles came not from himself but from God; the magicians (whose names have come down to us as Jannes and Jambres) counterfeited some, but not all, of the plagues through their knowledge of secret arts. The key issue, though, wasn't who could beat each other at conjuring tricks; it was who was truly lined up with the will of the One True God. Moses' one concern was to obey the great 'I Am'; theirs was to retain the favour of their earthly monarch and to impress people who were gullible enough to believe them. Thus their whole motivation was twisted out of shape, being directed at themselves and governed by their own agenda. That's exactly what has happened with these posers I'm talking about. Test them on what they really believe on key points of the faith – the divinity and humanity of Christ, the purpose of his death and resurrection, the person and work of the Holy Spirit, law and grace and so on – and you'll find it's hollow through and through. [3:9] Falsehood has power to deceive up to a point, but then it collapses under the weight of commonsense logic. Does your gospel work? Can your God make a difference to people's lives? In the end, just as the Egyptian sorcerers proved completely useless in that they could only reproduce the evils that everybody was crying out to have removed, so your opponents will make themselves look stupid as their prescriptions (whether of ever more detailed applications of the Law, or of increasingly permissive philosophies) make absolutely no difference to the basic malaise of the human heart, which is disobedience and selfishness, and which can only be cured by the Great Physician himself, Christ in our lives bringing us into his own perfect likeness and glory.

3:10-11 ¹⁰ You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, ¹¹ persecutions, sufferings – what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.

Testimonial

[3:10] 'But, Paul, how do we know you're serving the One True God any more than these people are?' Legitimate question. I can only appeal to your experience, Timothy. You've been with me on countless missions, you've walked long miles of rough, dusty roads in my company, you've spent the best part of twenty years watching me and listening to my sometimes painful efforts to explain the gospel. If there's anyone who can witness to what I've consistently taught about the Lord Jesus Christ, it's you. No-one has had a better chance to observe my personal habits and self-discipline, or to test the singlemindedness of my desire to serve the Master. Whether I've been wrestling with issues of faith, or trying to put up with impossible opponents, or setting myself to love people I don't get on with, or simply gritting my teeth and carrying on when everything's been going wrong, you've had ample opportunity to see what I'm really like. [3:11] You could write a whole book about the relentless way I've been hounded from city to city, stoned, beaten up, imprisoned – in fact Luke tells me you've contributed a lot of material to this three-volume history he's writing! He's been interviewing me as well, and I've had to relive those horrendous experiences from that first visit to your neck of the woods, you know, when the Jews couldn't tolerate our including Gentiles in the invitation to the kingdom and we got chased all over Galatia, from Antioch to Iconium and from Iconium to Lystra (where I went through that near-death episode) and then went back through the danger zone – you saw some of it yourself, and you were a trophy from those painful days. It was

only through the grace of the Lord Jesus that I survived, as time and again he improbably came to my rescue. The way his people rallied round was and still is unforgettable.

3:12-13 ¹² *In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

Wiping out the Jesus-movement

[3:12] It's quite a mystery, this persecution bit. I'll never forget Barnabas standing up after the Lystra business and telling the nervous new Christians bluntly, 'If anyone thinks they're going to float into the kingdom of God on a feather mattress, they're in for a big shock.' You think, 'Oh, I'm on God's side now, Jesus has conquered death and hell, I'm determined to live one hundred-per-cent for him – so why is all this happening to me?' Answer: because the forces of darkness that run this world don't like holy people. [3:13] So they send in their heavies, who may be thoroughly nasty people like Alexander (I'll come back to him), or plausible witch-doctors like Bar-Jesus on Cyprus – these kind of people aren't suddenly going to turn nice and friendly, in fact quite the opposite. They spin lies about God's servants because their master is the arch-deceiver, and he's got them thoroughly fooled. He is committed to wiping out the whole Jesus-movement. I should know; I too was his henchman once.

3:14-15 ¹⁴ *But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*

The school of faith

[3:14] So don't get depressed, Timothy, if you find yourself up against it. Just stay put. You were educated in a good school, the school of faith, belief against the odds. Think back to the roots and origins of your faith, the character of the people who were your teachers and trainers. You weren't converted because some Jesus people suddenly turned up at Lystra. [3:15] It goes back to what you imbibed with your mother's milk! You were surrounded with Holy Scripture night and day; you were rocked to sleep with little songs and prayers from the Psalms, your daily tonic was a rich mix of stories from the patriarchs and kings, prophetic vistas were unfolded to the eyes of your young imagination. And all the time the word of God was working its powerful wisdom in your mind and soul, the knowledge of a God who never fails to save. A God who finally knocked on your door in the person of a King crowned with thorns, a Master who buried death itself. Jesus.

3:16-17 ¹⁶ *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God^a may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Words that work

[3:16] That chest of scrolls you remember so well from your young days, many of them in the Greek version - they might seem to be just like any other book, subject to the whims and partial viewpoints of human authors, editors, translators and interpreters. Yet uniquely and incredibly, both in their broad scope and in minute detail, they are God's written word to his people everywhere, infused with the Spirit of Christ from beginning to end. And they're not like those speculative cultic writings you find cramming the bookshops in modern Ephesus or Rome – they're really down-to-earth and practical, perfectly tailored to our deepest requirements as sinners on the way to being saints. Whatever stage we've reached in the school of faith, whatever issues our conscience is wrestling with, however badly we've stumbled on our journey through this world, whatever further training we need in the way of holiness – it's all there in Scripture.

We're not worshipping a book, we're learning to love a Saviour God; and that's why so many of us are working on new Jesus-Scriptures, showing how the old truths have become re-irrigated by the new covenant in Christ. One day no doubt the circle will be complete and people will be able to hold in their hands the whole authentic mind of God as far as he has revealed it to us – but the point is not that we should just possess God's inspired word (precious as it is), but that it should be working in our lives.

[3:17] It's no coincidence that our Divine Master should have been a carpenter during his earthly life. There he was in his front room, working away at all kinds of designs and creations, cutting each piece of wood to its right length, planing here, dovetailing there, joining, sandpapering, varnishing, until the finished article stood four-square on its base, ready for use in house, home or public hall. He's still in the same job, only now his tools are faith-words applied by the Spirit, and his creations are individual men and women of God, the whole body of Christ on earth, fit for his purpose in a world which so badly needs goodness. What's happening to you, dear Timothy, isn't a series of random hammer-blows – it's the loving craftsmanship of a God whose works are perfect, and all his ways are right.

4:1-2 ⁴ *In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ² preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction.*

Final charge

[4:1] I'm now going to say the most important thing I've ever said to you or anyone else; and I'm saying it in the very presence of the Lord Almighty, with his Son Jesus seated in glory at his right hand, and in the full consciousness that this same Jesus is soon going to determine the eternal destiny of every single person who has ever lived, when he returns to unite heaven and earth in his kingdom of perfect love and justice. Just as Moses laid a solemn charge upon the Lord's people before he went up the mountain to meet his appointed death, telling them to take his words to heart and to pass them on to their children – so I'm now going to lay a final charge upon you, as the successor and heir to my life and ministry. [4:2] Get the message out by every possible means. Make it your absolute priority. Talk about the Lord Jesus Christ whenever you can, not only on 'official' occasions, but also when there's just a fleeting opportunity. Don't be afraid of telling people they're wrong (but don't be pompous or humourless). Give God the chance to make your opponents ashamed of their error. Bring hope to the discouraged and confidence to the apprehensive. You're going to need every ounce of patience and self-control the Spirit can give you. The secret is to open your heart to the Spirit's love; you may not have time or inclination to speak to this or that person, but Jesus has. God has given you the gift of teaching, with all the powers of application, memory and creative imagination that needs – use it for him!

4:3-4 ³ *For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather round them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.*

What people like to hear

[4:3] The door for the gospel may not remain open for very much longer. Human nature can't stand being told that it's sick, nor does it like the taste of God's medicine. 'How dare you tell me I'm selfish and need my life turned right round!' It's our natural tendency to surround ourselves with people who tell us what we want to hear, anthologies of quotations that pamper our souls, courses on self-improvement which will satisfy our craving for a better life without ever solving the God-hunger at the root of it all. I will never forget watching a group of highly intelligent theologians

putting their hands over their ears and yelling blue murder at a man called Stephen, before stoning him to death with my full approval – all because he dared to tell us the truth about ourselves. [4:4] The fact is, people prefer to hear any amount of made-up stories, homely moral tales, weird and wonderful excursions into fantasy, anything rather than the simple message (brought in a thousand different ways) that God loves them and sent his Son to die their death and to share his endless life with them.

4:5 ⁵ *But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*

Full-time occupation

[4:5] I'm not insisting that you have to go completely over the top, turn into a swivel-eyed gospel-freak, lose your reputation for canny commonsense and good-humoured tolerance, or anything like that. Even as a sensible and respected member of society, you're going to get more than your fair share of stick if you dare to line up with Christ (as I've said already). Just constantly recall the main reason you're there in Ephesus, which is to be God's man with God's story. That's enough to keep you occupied full-time, consistently putting yourself at the service of people and their needs, nurturing a witnessing community, growing the body of Christ in your generation.

4:6-8 ⁶ *For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

What the future holds

[4:6] The point is, I'm moving on. Physical death is nothing to be afraid of – there's a whole range of images that come into my mind as I meditate on this. I have always regarded my life as a precious thank-offering to the Lord, so now it's as if the last drops of wine are due to be poured on the altar. Or if you like to think of life as being like a voyage, the time has come for me to pull up my anchor and put out to sea. [4:7] Or maybe you could picture our existence in this world as being more like an Olympic wrestling match – well, I seem to be still on my feet (amazingly) after my full fifteen rounds, so now it's the moment to take my bow and walk out of the ring. Or to take another Olympic metaphor, I've reached the last lap of the long-distance race in the stadium, and exhausted as I am, I'm determined to reach the tape and show that I'm not ashamed of my performance. Or my favourite image of all, I'm like a treasurer who's been entrusted with a precious heirloom, representing the gospel of God's love toward us in Christ, and this is the moment to render it back to my Master in as good a condition as when I received it for safe keeping.

[4:8] What does the future hold for me? Why, it's the great Award Ceremony at the end of the games (yes, the Olympics again!) when I stand on the winner's podium and receive that gold medal I've coveted for so long and strained so hard to win, personally put round my neck by the One who is best qualified to determine the verdict, as he whispers in my ear, 'Well done, good and faithful servant!' And in case I should give the impression that I'm the only one up there on the dais, let me assure you that there's a great throng of winners there too, too many to number, all with their eyes glistening with love and gratitude for their Lord who ran such a gruelling race on their behalf, and who has now re-appeared in full regalia to bring the whole Games to a triumphant conclusion.

4:9-10 ⁹ Do your best to come to me quickly, ¹⁰ for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia.

Crisis situation

[4:9] But back to the present situation. Actually, things are a bit critical right now. I just wonder whether you could drop everything and get over here as fast as humanly possible, because I haven't got long. [4:10] My support team seems to have melted away. You remember Demas, who was such a strength to me in my earlier imprisonment here and who was mustard-keen to spread the gospel? Well, he's invented some excuse to go on a business trip to Thessalonica, but it's really because he can't face the prospect of losing his earthly life for Christ. I reminded him of the Master's words about gaining the whole world and forfeiting your soul, but he wasn't having any. It's been a body-blow, I can tell you. I feel thoroughly let down; but I'm not going to stop praying for him.

There are others who wanted to stay here with me, but God's mission must go on – Crescens feels called to strengthen the faith of the Galatian churches, while Titus has gone back to Dalmatia to continue the work there.

4:11-13 ¹¹ Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. ¹² I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. ¹³ When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.

Important arrangements

[4:11] Actually, there is one dear friend who absolutely refuses to leave my side, and I expect you can guess who that is: Dr Luke himself. I don't know who might be reading this letter, so I'm not going to go into details, but it is very important that you collect John Mark and bring him with you, because he's a key person for me just now – let's just say that I need him for a particular job. [4:12] If you ask how consistent is my request for you to come to Rome with what I said just now about you staying on at Ephesus, don't worry – I've already made the necessary arrangements. Why else would I have sent this letter with Tychicus? Yes, he's coming to Ephesus as my personal envoy and he'll cover your absence. So you're free to leave the moment you read these words. [4:13] I imagine you'll want to take the overland route through Macedonia so could you possibly pick up the nice warm cloak I had to abandon at Troas at the house of Carpus, because the central heating isn't working in this jail. As it so happens, there are some scrolls I'd quite like to have here with me, and while you're about it, you might bring the parchment notebooks you'll find there with them. Again, I'm not going to explain why, but it's not just for holiday reading, as I'm sure you'll understand. Show this letter to Carpus as a confirmation. Sorry to add to your luggage.

4:14-15 ¹⁴ Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. ¹⁵ You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message.

Watch out!

[4:14-15] You will need to watch out for a certain gentleman named Alexander: I'm not talking about Alexander the Great, I mean a well-known craftsman in silver and bronze statues. Yes, the one who did so much damage to me. It was an overflow of stored-up malice. I'm not personally set on revenge for his betrayal – the Lord knows what he has done and there'll come a time for him to settle accounts with the Just Judge of all. But mark my words, he's capable of causing trouble for you as well. The gospel has got thoroughly under his skin, and he has consistently shown himself to be an implacable opponent of our teaching.

4:16-17 ¹⁶ *At my first defence, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them.* ¹⁷ *But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth.*

First hearing

[4:16] Now you'll want to know about my trial, or the first hearing at least, which is as far as we've got. I'll tell you the bad news first: all the support I had counted on melted away. I found myself going through the same experience of total abandonment as the Lord himself; like him I have been requesting that those responsible should not have this offence charged to their account (after all, the blessed Stephen prayed the same prayer for me). [4:17] But it wasn't a total disaster, far from it: the Lord himself never let me down for a single moment. He was there beside me, pouring strength into me, keeping me utterly serene and steadfast, putting words into my mouth direct from the Spirit. As I looked round at the crowds both inside the courtroom and spilling out into the street, it seemed to me that there were representatives from every nation upon earth – one day they were going to bow the knee, willingly or unwillingly, to the Lord who died for them, so why shouldn't they hear about it right here in the capital of the Roman Empire?

Now you won't believe this, but instead of stammering out words in my own defence, I found myself confidently proclaiming the love of God and the Lordship of Christ! And it had the most amazing effect – it was rather like Daniel in the lions' den. All the powerful forces ranged against me, professional Roman barristers, determined Jewish opponents, the emperor Nero himself flanked by his hard-as-nails henchmen – they could have devoured me in a single gulp, and yet they sat there in perfect silence as the message of reconciliation bathed them in waves of grace. Truly the words of that prophetic Psalm came true: I was indeed 'saved from the lion's mouth'. They may get me in the end, but so what? The gospel story is out in the open, doing its wonderful work to the ends of the earth.

4:18 ¹⁸ *The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Ultimate rescue

[4:18] Whatever happens to me, I'm sure of one thing: the devil isn't going to win. I may still be in mortal danger here on earth, but my ultimate rescue is beyond doubt. I'm not just whistling in the dark – I'm rehearsing for that triumph song which will echo through the courts of heaven as all the redeemed come home. The Lord told us memorably that all the places at the kingdom feast are going to be filled to overflowing, and the glory will be all his. Eternity will be too short for all the oratorios of praise that are going to be sung, just mark my words!

4:19-21 ¹⁹ *Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus.* ²⁰ *Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus ill in Miletus.* ²¹ *Do your best to get here before winter. Eubulus greets you, and so do Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers and sisters.*

Friends

[4:19] A few greetings to finish with. I gather my dear friends, the amazing Prisca and Aquila, are back in Ephesus: I can't forget how I owe my very life to them and I miss them acutely. Tell the grieving family of Onesiphorus that I constantly think of them, and him of course, with heartfelt compassion and gratitude. [4:20] I had to say goodbye to Erastus at Corinth as he was needed there for the Lord's work; and Trophimus was sickening with the fever at Miletus so I had to go on without him. [4:21] Please lay yourself on the line to get here before the weather makes travel well-

nigh impossible. There are many faithful Christians here who remember you, among them being Eubulus, Pudens, Linus and Claudia.

4:22 ²² *The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you all.*

Signing off

[4:22] Now I'll sign off in my own inimitable script. Timothy, may the Lord's presence be very real to you as you draw on his strength for the spiritual battle. And may all of you in the Ephesian churches constantly rejoice in the uninterrupted waves of love, mercy and resourcefulness that flow from our glorious God and Saviour.

2 TIMOTHY CROSS-REFERENCES

Underlined direct quotation from OT. * Probable allusion. References are listed in biblical order.

1:1-2 *He has promised* 1 Tim 4:8. *Nothing to be afraid of* Ps 56:8-11. *Greeted you before* 1 Tim 1:2. *Triple blessing* Num 6:24-26. *All your cares* Ps 55:22, 1Pet 5:7.

1:3-5 *Humbly with their God* Mic 6:8. *Tried to do myself* Acts 23:1. *Get you over here* 2 Tim 4:9. *Her own difficulties* Acts 16:1. *Her Jewish tradition* 2 Tim 3:14-15.

1:6-7 *Afraid of anything ever again* Jn 14:26-27, Rom 8:15.

1:8 *Entertain the crowds* Tacitus *Annals* 15,44. *Hate campaign against us* Acts 28:22.

1:9-10 *Pulled us out* Ps 107:13. *On the palms of his hands* Isa 49:16. *Imperishable and glorious life* Isa 60:19.

1:11-12 *Commission me* Acts 26:18. *The Lord is on my side* Isa 50:7. *Ministry of reconciliation* 2 Cor 5:19.

1:13-14 *Follow it exactly* Rom 6:17. *As indeed it was for him* Mt 26:42. *Permanent residence in your midst* Rom 8:11, 2 Cor 6:16.

1:15-18 *In these difficult circumstances* 2 Tim 4:19. *In his favour* Heb 6:10. *Terrible days in Ephesus* 1 Cor 15:32.

2:1-2 *Barnabas would have said* Acts 14:22.

2:3-4 *Soldiers of Christ* Eph 6:10ff.

2:5 *We're going to have to follow* Acts 20:24, 2 Tim 4:7.

2:6-7 *Out of proportion to our efforts* Mt 25:21. *Guidance in abundance* Jas 1:5. *Apply it in practice* *Prov 1:7, 2:6.

2:8-10 *Eyes upon Jesus* Heb 12:2. *Greater even than David* Ps 110:1. *To get rid of me* 2 Cor 11:23ff. *A people for his own glory* Isa 43:19-21, 49:5-6.

2:11-13 *With Jesus on his throne* Rev 2:10, 3:21. *Will he change his mind?* Num 23:19.

2:14-15 *Eyes fixed on Jesus* Ps 123:2. *Stood in the presence of God* 1 Ki 17:1. *Faithful servant* Mt 25:23. *Shoddily put together* Mk 7:37. *Save their souls* 1 Tim 4:16. *Hidden in the heart* Ps 119:11.

2:16-18 *Voices from the dead* *Isa 8:19. *In my earlier letter* 1 Tim 6:20. *Hymenaeus* 1 Tim 1:20.

Clearly taught in Scripture Isa 26:19. *By the Lord himself* Mk 12:26. *Dealt with them on the cross* Jn 5:24, Col 2:13-14.

2:19 *The cornerstone* Isa 28:16. *Unalterably in place* 1 Cor 3:11. *Authoritative signature* Jn 6:27. *Sons of Korah* *Num 16. *Royal priesthood* Exod 19:5-6. *Belong to him* Mt 11:27. *The judgment fell* *Num 16:26.

2:20-21 *Stay faithful to him* 1 Cor 4:2.

2:22 *Potiphar's wife* Gen 39:6-13. *Sinning against God* Gen 39:9. *Fellowship with him* 1 Jn 1:6.

2:23-26 *My earlier point* 2 Tim 2:16. *Assertions about angels* Jude 10. *Blather about spiritual reality* 1 Tim 6:20.

Personal humility 2 Cor 10:1. *Gentle in heart* Mt 11:29. *Look total idiots* Lk 24:25. *Jesus I was persecuting* Acts 9:5.

One True God Acts 26:9. *Rocks you to sleep* 1 Jn 5:19. *Takes a divine miracle* Mk 10:27.

3:1-5 *Give us the credit* Prov 27:2.

3:6-7 *Charlatan missionaries* 2 Pet 2:14.

3:8-9 *The sorcerers of Egypt* *Exod 7-9. *Crying out to have removed* Exod 8:7. *Likeness and glory* 2 Cor 3:18, Col 1:27.

3:10-11 *Beaten up, imprisoned* 2 Cor 11:23-33. *That first visit* Acts 13-14. *Including Gentiles* Acts 13:46. *Near-death episode* Acts 14:19-20. *You were a trophy* Acts 16:1-3. *Improbably came to my rescue* *Ps 34:17, 19.

3:12-13 *I'll never forget Barnabas* Acts 14:22. *All this happening to me* Rom 8:31, 35-36. *Alexander* 2 Tim 4:14. *Bar-Jesus* Acts 13:6. *Arch-deceiver* Jn 8:44, Rev 12:9.

3:14-15 *Its powerful wisdom* Ps 119:99.

3:16-17 *In the Greek version* Acts 16:1-2. *New Jesus-Scriptures* 2 Tim 4:11, 13. 2 Pet 3:15-16. *All his ways are right* Deut 32:4.

4:1-2 *Moses laid a solemn charge* Deut 32:46. *Absolute priority* Rom 10:17.

4:3-4 *Stephen* Acts 7:57. *My full approval* Acts 8:1.

4:5 *I've said already* 2 Tim 1:8. *Growing the body of Christ* Eph 4:12.

4:6-8 *Nothing to be afraid of* Phil 1:20ff. *Precious thank-offering* Phil 2:17. *Pull up my anchor* Phil 1:23. *Treasurer* 1 Cor 4:1-2, 2 Tim 1:12, 14. *Strained so hard to win* Phil 3:14. *Too many to number* Rev 7:9.

4:9-10 *Demas* Col 4:14, Phm 24. *Forfeiting your soul* Mk 8:36, Lk 9:25. *Titus* Tit 3:12.

4:11-13 *Dr Luke* Col 4:14. *John Mark* Col 4:10, Phm 24. *Tychicus* Tit 3:12.

4:14-15 *Did so much damage to me* 1 Tim 1:20. *Just Judge of all* Ps 62:12; Mt 16:27; Rom 2:6.

4:16-17 *The Lord himself* *Ps 22:1, Mk 15:34. *Like him* Lk 23:34. *The blessed Stephen* Acts 7:60. *Direct from the Spirit* Mk 13:11. *Bow the knee* Phil 2:10-11. *Daniel in the lions' den* Dan 6:22. *Saved from the lion's mouth* Ps 22:21. *Out in the open* 2 Tim 2:9. *To the ends of the earth* Ps 22:27.

4:18 *Filled to overflowing* Lk 14:23. *Oratorios of praise* Ps 22:23.

4:19-21 *Erastus* Rom 16:23. *Trophimus* Acts 20:4. *Owe my life to them* Rom 16:3-4.

4:22 *Glorious God and Saviour* 1 Tim 1:1.

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