

SERIES ENDORSEMENTS

“There are so many fine commentaries available today, but it’s great to have a reliable author you can turn to for solid Reformed reflections on Scripture. In this case, there are sixteen of them—friends and fellow shepherds who have given me great insight into God’s Word over the years. I’m looking forward eagerly to each one of these sermonic commentaries!”

Michael S. Horton

J. Gresham Machen Professor of Apologetics and
Systematic Theology at Westminster Seminary California
Host of the *White Horse Inn* Talk Show
Editor-in-Chief of *Modern Reformation* magazine

“Those of us who have promoted and practiced *lectio continua* expository preaching through the years eagerly await the volumes announced in the *Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament*. We are equally eager to read such a series written by pastors who have practiced the method in their churches. The international and interdenominational character of the series will only add to the richness of its insights.”

T. David Gordon

Professor of Religion and Greek at Grove City College
Author of *Why Johnny Can’t Preach* (P&R, 2009)

“As the history of preaching is unfolded, it becomes clear how important the orderly, systematic preaching through the Scriptures has been, and why it has been a favorite homiletic approach over the centuries. One is surprised to discover how many of history’s great preachers made a regular practice of preaching through one book of the Bible after another. Origen, the first Christian preacher from whom we have any sizable collection of sermons, preached most of his sermons on the *lectio continua*. We find the same with John Chrysostom who is usually referred to as the greatest Christian preacher. We find the same true of Augustine as well. At the

time of the Protestant Reformation, Zwingli, Calvin, Bucer, and Knox followed this system regularly, and they passed it on to the Puritans. Today, we see a real revival of *lectio continua* preaching. *The Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament* represents a wonderful opportunity for the Church to recover a truly expository pulpit.”

Hughes Oliphant Old

Formerly John H. Leith Professor of Reformed Theology
and Worship at Erskine Theological Seminary

Author of *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the
Worship of the Christian Church* (7 vols., Eerdmans, 2007)

“The concept behind this series is a fascinating one and, given the list of authors, I am confident that the final product will not disappoint. This promises to be a great resource for churches seeking to know the Word of God more fully.”

Carl R. Trueman

Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies at
Grove City College

Second Timothy

THE LECTIO CONTINUA
EXPOSITORY COMMENTARY ON THE NEW TESTAMENT

Series Editors

Joel R. Beeke | Jon D. Payne

Other available books in this series:

Romans — J. V. Fesko

First Corinthians — Kim Riddlebarger

Galatians — J. V. Fesko

Ephesians — Ian Hamilton

Philippians — David T. A. Strain

Hebrews — David B. McWilliams

Revelation — Joel R. Beeke

Second Timothy

Michael G. Brown



REFORMATION HERITAGE BOOKS
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Second Timothy

© 2022 by Michael G. Brown

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. Direct your requests to the publisher at the following addresses:

Reformation Heritage Books

3070 29th St. SE

Grand Rapids, MI 49512

616-977-0889

orders@heritagebooks.org

www.heritagebooks.org

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked ESV are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All italics in Scripture quotations have been added by the author.

Printed in the United States of America

22 23 24 25 26 27/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Brown, Michael (Michael Grant), 1970- author.

Title: Second Timothy / Michael G. Brown.

Description: Grand Rapids, Michigan : Reformation Heritage Books, [2022] |

Series: The Lectio Continua expository commentary on the New Testament |

Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021043199 (print) | LCCN 2021043200 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781601789105 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781601789112 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Bible. Timothy, 2nd—Commentaries.

Classification: LCC BS2745.53 .B76 2022 (print) | LCC BS2745.53 (ebook) |

DDC 227/.8407—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021043199>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021043200>

For additional Reformed literature, request a free book list from Reformation Heritage Books at the above regular or email address.

For my sons,

ISAAC and IAIN

From childhood you have known the Holy
Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for
salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

—2 Timothy 3:15

Contents

Preface	xi
Series Introduction	xv
Introduction	1
1. Courageous for the Gospel (1:1–6)	13
2. A Spirit of Power, Love, and Self-Control (1:7)	29
3. A Gospel Worth Suffering For (1:8–12)	41
4. The Pattern of Sound Words (1:13–18)	57
5. Wanted: Soldiers, Athletes, and Farmers (2:1–7)	69
6. Your Best Life Later (2:8–13)	85
7. A Workman for the Gospel (2:14–19)	95
8. Vessels of Honor (2:20–26)	107
9. Difficulty in the Last Days (3:1–9)	121
10. <i>Sola Scriptura</i> (3:10–17)	135
11. Preach the Word! (4:1–5)	147
12. Finishing Well (4:6–8)	159
13. Safely into His Heavenly Kingdom (4:9–22)	171



*Saint Thomas Church in Strausbourg,
where Martin Bucer exposted God's Word in 1523.*

Preface

On a clear day, I can see the Italian Alps from the balcony in my study. Their impressive form stares at me like the imposing faces of majestic giants, sculpted by deep lines of gray and green, crowned with snow-topped peaks. Living in Milan, I know that the Alps are never far away. A map over my desk shows me their geographical proximity. But the fact is that most days I can't see them at all. They are usually obscured by the city's notorious *nebbia*, the foggy haze that completely washes out the horizon. Months pass before I can even manage to make out a few of the Alps's jagged lines. It is easy to forget that these breathtaking mountains are a present reality. Whenever they reappear, it is always a pleasant surprise.

Over the years I have had a similar experience with 2 Timothy. I am well aware that this short letter is in the New Testament, located between Paul's other two Pastoral Epistles, 1 Timothy and Titus. I am familiar with its contents and have preached and taught on it many times. Yet much like the joy I receive when the Alps reemerge from their hiding, I experience amazement when I read 2 Timothy in its entirety. This letter offers far more than pious advice for pastors (a noble thing in itself); it is nothing short of a devotional masterpiece. These are the last surviving words of an apostle who "fought the good fight...finished the race...[and] kept the faith" (4:7). It is a letter full of encouragement for believers in every age as they seek to live out their faith in a hostile world and bring the gospel to the next generation. Second Timothy is a lush valley in the green pastures of God's Word.

This commentary is based on sermons I preached in 2012 at Christ United Reformed Church in Santee, California, where I served as pastor from 2003 to 2018. The content was sharpened and refined, however, during the subsequent years as my appreciation for 2 Timothy continued to grow. It was particularly during the period of 2015 to 2018, while I wrestled with God's call to leave a beloved ministry and comfortable life in San Diego to serve on the foreign mission field, that I read, reread, reflected on, and prayed more deeply through this marvelous letter. In many ways, this commentary was hammered out by the Lord on the anvil of my own doubts and fears about the future. The outcome is an exposition of 2 Timothy that aims not only to be Christ-centered, redemptive-historical, and gospel-focused but also packed with pastoral and practical application. God willing, it can serve as a tool for a pastor while he preaches *lectio continua* through 2 Timothy, a resource for church leadership to read together, or devotional material for the individual Christian or prayer group. May God use what has been written in these pages to strengthen believers by the grace that is in Christ Jesus to endure suffering for His gospel and persevere to the end.

In writing this commentary, I sought to read broadly in the Christian tradition the vast scholarship on the Pastoral Epistles. Those whom I found most helpful include George Knight III, Philip Towner, John Calvin, Walter Liefeld, Donald Guthrie, Gordon Fee, Patrick Fairbairn, William Mounce, J. N. D. Kelly, and John Stott. I have also tried to incorporate comments from the early church fathers where applicable, as I believe firmly in the importance of showing the continuity between the Reformation and the ancient church.

I am grateful to my good friend and colleague Rev. Dr. Jon Payne for asking me to write this commentary and for his extraordinary patience while he waited for the manuscript! May you continue to preach the word, Jon, always being ready in season and out of season. I also want to extend my thanks to those who read the manuscript (or parts thereof) and offered helpful feedback, suggestions, and encouragement: Joel Beeke, J. V. Fesko, Simonetta

Carr, Chuck Tedrick, Brad Lenzner, Mark Patterson, and especially Barbara LaPointe. As always, I am indebted to my beloved wife, Janie, who is my biggest supporter and source of encouragement in my ministry both as a preacher and as a writer.

I have dedicated this book to my sons, Isaac and Iain. May our Lord strengthen you by His glorious gospel to fight the good fight of faith and finish the race.

Michael G. Brown
Milan, Italy

Series Introduction

The greatest need of the church today is the recovery of sound biblical preaching. We need preaching that faithfully explains and applies the text, courageously confronts sin, and boldly trumpets forth the sovereign majesty, law, and gospel promises of God. This type of powerful proclamation has vanished in many quarters of the evangelical church only to be replaced by that which is anemic and man-centered. Instead of doctrinally rich exposition which strengthens faith and fosters Christian maturity, the standard fare has become informal, chatty, anecdote-laden messages, devoid of instruction in the truths of the Christian faith. This approach leaves unbelievers confused and keeps believers in a state of chronic spiritual adolescence.¹

There is indeed a dire need for the recovery of solid biblical preaching. Not only does reformation of this sort lead Christ's sheep back to the verdant pastures of His soul-nourishing Word, it also provides a good example for present and future generations of

1. A stinging, yet constructive, critique of modern-day preaching is found in T. David Gordon's *Why Johnny Can't Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messengers* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2009). "I have come to recognize that many, many individuals today have never been under a steady diet of competent preaching.... As starving children in Manila sift through the landfill for food, Christians in many churches today have never experienced genuine soul-nourishing preaching, and so they just pick away at what is available to them, trying to find a morsel of spiritual sustenance or helpful counsel here or there" (Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach*, 17). Elements of this introduction are adapted from Jon D. Payne, "The Roaring of Christ through *Lectio Continua* Preaching," *Modern Reformation* 19, no. 6 (Nov.–Dec. 2010): 23–24, and are used by permission of the publisher.

ministers. For this reason, we are pleased to introduce The *Lectio Continua* Expository Commentary on the New Testament, a new series of expository commentaries authored by an array of seasoned pastor-scholars from various Reformed denominations on both sides of the Atlantic.

What is the *lectio continua* method of preaching?² It is simply the uninterrupted, systematic, expository proclamation of God's Word—verse by verse, chapter by chapter, book by book—that endeavors to deliver the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26–27). Christian discipleship is impoverished when large portions of Scripture are ignored. Carried out faithfully, the *lectio continua* method ensures that every passage is mined for its riches (even those verses which are obscure, controversial, or hard to swallow). Paul states that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16–17 KJV).

Lectio continua preaching has a splendid heritage. It finds its roots in the early church and patristic eras. Its use, however, was revived and greatly expanded during the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. When Huldrych Zwingli (d. 1531) arrived at the Zurich Grossmunster in 1519, it was his desire to dispense with the standard lectionary³ and introduce *lectio continua* preaching to his congregation by moving systematically through the Gospel of Matthew. At first, some members of his church council were suspicious. They were uncomfortable replacing the lectionary with this

2. In Christianity, *lectio continua* (Latin for continuous reading) originally referred to the practice of reading Scripture sequentially in public worship, as was the practice of the ancient church. This practice is recommended by the Westminster divines in the Directory for Public Worship, which, in turn, served as an impetus for *lectio continua* preaching. Sadly, Scripture reading in this manner has been neglected in Reformed and Presbyterian churches for many generations, perhaps as far back as the eighteenth century, when public worship was reduced to sermon-hearing sessions.

3. A lectionary is a plan or table of Scripture passages to be read in the services of church for each day or week of the year.

seemingly new approach. But Zwingli explained that the *lectio continua* method of preaching was not new at all. On the contrary, important figures such as Augustine (d. 430), Chrysostom (d. 407), and Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153) all employed this homiletical approach. Zwingli is quoted by his successor, Heinrich Bullinger (d. 1575), as saying that “no friend of evangelical truth could have any reason to complain” about such a method.⁴

Zwingli rightly believed that the quickest way to restore biblical Christianity to the church was to preach the whole counsel of God verse by verse, chapter by chapter, book by book, Lord’s Day after Lord’s Day, year after year. Other Reformers agreed and followed his pattern. In the city of Strasbourg, just ninety miles north of Zurich, preachers such as Martin Bucer (d. 1551), Wolfgang Capito (d. 1570), and Kaspar Hedio (d. 1552) practiced *lectio continua* preaching. Johannes Oecolampadius (d. 1531) boldly preached the *lectio continua* in Basel. And let us not forget John Calvin (d. 1564); between 1549 and 1564, the Genevan Reformer preached sequentially through no fewer than twenty-five books of the Bible (over two thousand sermons), which he was able to do because he also preached regularly for weekday services.⁵

The example of these Reformers has been emulated by preachers throughout the centuries, from the post-Reformation age down to the present. In the last half of the twentieth century, Donald Grey Barnhouse (1895–1960), Martyn Lloyd-Jones (d. 1981), William Still (d. 1997), James Montgomery Boice (d. 2000), and John MacArthur all boldly preached straight through books of the Bible from their pulpits. But why? Surely we have acquired better, more

4. It is interesting to note that the year before Zwingli began preaching sequentially through books of the Bible, he had received a new edition of Chrysostom’s *lectio continua* sermons on Matthew’s gospel. See Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship* (Black Mountain, N.C.: Worship Press, 2004), 195. Cf. Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 4: *The Age of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), and Timothy George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2011), 228–53.

5. T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin’s Preaching* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 159.

contemporary methods of preaching? Is the *lectio continua* relevant in our twenty-first-century context? In a day when biblical preaching is being increasingly undermined and marginalized by media/story/therapy/personality-driven sermons, even among the avowedly Reformed, these are important questions to consider.

Shortly before the apostle Paul was martyred in Rome by Emperor Nero, he penned 2 Timothy. In what proved to be some of his final words to his young disciple, he wrote, “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ...*preach the word*; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:1–2 KJV). This directive was not meant only for Timothy. It is the duty of every Christian minister (and church) to heed these timeless words; according to God’s divine blueprint for ministry, it is chiefly through the faithful proclamation of the Word that Christ saves, sanctifies, and comforts the beloved church for which He died.⁶ In other words, the preaching of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments are the divinely sanctioned and efficacious means by which Christ and all His benefits of redemption are communicated to the elect. For this reason alone the *lectio continua* method of preaching is a helpful practice in our churches, providing a steady diet of law and gospel from the entirety of God’s Word.

Some may ask, “Why another expository commentary series?” First, because in every generation it is highly valuable to provide fresh and reliable expositions of God’s Word. Every age possesses its own set of theological, ecclesiastical, and cultural challenges. Thus, it is beneficial for both current and rising ministers in every generation to have trustworthy contemporary models of biblical preaching. Second, these volumes uniquely feature the expositions of an array of pastors from a variety of Reformed and confessional traditions. Consequently, this series brings a wealth of exegetical, confessional,

6. See Matthew 28:18–20; Romans 10:14–17; 1 Corinthians 1:18–21; 1 Peter 1:22–25; Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 89.

experiential, and practical insight, and furnishes the reader with an instructive and stimulating selection of *lectio continua* sermons.

This commentary series is not meant to be academic or highly technical. There are many helpful exegetical commentaries written for that purpose. Rather, the aim is to provide *lectio continua* sermons, originally delivered to Reformed congregations, which clearly and faithfully communicate the context, meaning, gravity, and application of God's inerrant Word. Each volume of expositions aspires to be redemptive-historical, covenantal, Reformed and confessional, Trinitarian, Christ-centered, and teeming with spiritual and practical application. Therefore, we pray that the series will be a profound blessing to every Christian believer who longs to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

We are pleased to announce that this series of commentaries is now being published by Reformation Heritage Books, which graciously agreed to take over this large task from Tolle Lege Press. We thank Tolle Lege for printing the first three volumes (*First Corinthians* by Kim Riddlebarger, *Galatians* by J. V. Fesko, and *Hebrews* by David B. McWilliams). We, Joel Beeke and Jon Payne, look forward to coediting the remainder of the series for Reformation Heritage Books. The goal is to publish two volumes per year in the King James or New King James Version, according to the choice of each author.

In addition to thanking Reformation Heritage Books and its faithful team for producing this series, we wish to thank our churches, Christ Church Presbyterian, Charleston, South Carolina, and the Heritage Reformed Congregation, Grand Rapids, Michigan, for warmly encouraging us as ministers to work on projects such as this one that impact the wider church. Furthermore, we thank our dear wives, Mary Beeke and Marla Payne, and our precious children for their heartwarming support, which makes editing a series like this one possible. We both feel that God has greatly blessed us with God-fearing wives and children who mean more to us than words can express.

Finally, and most importantly, thanks and praise must be given to our blessed triune God, the eternal Fountain of all grace and truth. By His sovereign love and mercy, and through faith in the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ, we have been “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Peter 1:23–25 KJV).

— Joel R. Beeke and Jon D. Payne, series editors

Introduction

Second Timothy may be the most underrated letter in the whole Pauline corpus. We typically do not show it the attention it deserves. This is somewhat understandable, given that this short epistle does not contain a majestic defense of the gospel as we find in Romans and Galatians or whole chapters of focused, doctrinal teaching like in 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians. It does not even appear (on the surface, at least) to have the kind of practical education for the church that we immediately discover in Paul's other Pastoral Epistles, 1 Timothy and Titus, both of which include instructions concerning the qualifications of men who desire to serve in church leadership (1 Tim. 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9).

Yet this little letter provides us with something that no other book in the New Testament does. It is Paul's last surviving piece of correspondence, offering us a glimpse of the aged apostle at the end of his life. After some thirty years of ministry, he has "fought the good fight...finished the race...kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). He is incarcerated in Rome and facing the death penalty. He is lonely, cold, and without the necessary tools to redeem the time. Still, he is full of hope, for he knows that the crown of righteousness is laid up for him (4:8) and the Lord will preserve him "for His heavenly kingdom" (4:18).

Convinced that the time of his departure is at hand, Paul writes with a great sense of urgency to his young and trusted colleague Timothy. Paul had finished his race. Timothy must now carry the torch. He must *guard the gospel* against false teachers so that it would be brought to the next generation (1:13–14; 2:16–18). He must

entrust the gospel “to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2:2). He must be willing to *suffer for the gospel* like his mentor (1:8, 12; 2:3, 9; 3:12; 4:5). Above all, he must *preach the gospel* and fulfill his ministry (2:15; 4:1–5). All of this makes 2 Timothy the most personal and intimate of Paul’s letters. As Philip Towner put it, “From the perspective of the Pauline corpus, or the Pauline story, this is the final chapter.”¹

Second Timothy is also a letter full of timely instruction for the church today. Like Timothy, we live in “the last days” (3:1), when people are “lovers of themselves, lovers of money” (3:2), and “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (3:4). We live in a time when people do “not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears...heap up for themselves teachers” (4:3). We need leaders in the church who will “hold fast the pattern of sound words” given by the apostles and codified in the church’s creeds and confessions (1:13). We need ministers who will “preach the word...in season and out of season” (4:2), who will “be watchful in all things, endure afflictions,” and “do the work of an evangelist” (4:5). Second Timothy describes the world in which the church now lives, a world full of apostasy and godlessness. If the gospel and sound doctrine are to advance into the next generation, the church (especially ministers of the word and church leaders) must heed the exhortations and warnings found in this small book.

This letter is also full of encouragement for Christians as they seek to live out their faith in a hostile world. Like Timothy, we can become discouraged by our circumstances and be afraid to suffer for the gospel. Paul helps us understand that “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (1:7). He writes to us as a pastor, telling us to “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2:1). He tells us that we can be confident in Scripture, which is “given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in

1. Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 79.

righteousness” (3:16). He faithfully points us to Christ and comforts us with God’s promise that He will award the crown of righteousness “on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (4:8). Far from being a technical manual for pastors, 2 Timothy is teeming with practical application for every believer.

Authorship

The writer of this letter identifies himself as the apostle Paul (2 Tim. 1:1). There is no compelling reason for us to believe that this Paul was anyone other than the former persecutor of Christians whom Christ called to be an apostle (Acts 9:1–22). He opens the letter with a salutation (2 Tim. 1:2) and concludes with a benediction (4:22) in a formula consistent with all other Pauline letters. He refers to his appointment as “a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher” (1:11) and makes multiple references to his sufferings for the gospel (1:8, 12; 2:9–10; 3:11). He refers to Timothy as his “beloved son” (1:2; see also 2:1) and displays intimate knowledge of him, his family, and his ministry (1:3–6, 13–14; 3:10–11, 14–15; 4:13, 21). He presents God as the one who saves us “not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began” (1:9). This Christ “abolished death” through the cross (1:10), is now “raised from the dead” (2:8), and has given us “the Holy Spirit who dwells in us” (1:14). He exalts Scripture as the inspired word of God (3:16; cf. 2:9), which must be preached (4:2), followed (1:13), and defended (2:2, 15–18; 4:3–4). All this and much more bear witness to the internal evidence that 2 Timothy was written by the apostle Paul.

Additionally, the external evidence for Pauline authorship of this letter is very strong. Like the other Pastoral Epistles, 2 Timothy was regarded as Pauline in the early church. Allusions to the Pastoral Epistles are found in 1 Clement (ca. 96), the works of Ignatius (d. 108), Polycarp (d. 155), and Justyn Martyr (d. 165), and citations are made by Irenaeus (d. 202) and Clement of Alexandria (d. 211). The Muratorian Canon, a late second-century document that lists recognized biblical writings, ascribes 2 Timothy to the

apostle Paul. Moreover, in the fourth century, the church historian Eusebius included 2 Timothy among the Pauline Epistles and as part of the New Testament canon.²

One exception to the early church's recognition of 2 Timothy as Pauline was the heretic Marcion's claim (85–160) that the Pastoral Epistles were not written by Paul.³ Marcion rejected much of the Bible largely on the basis of his belief that the God described in the Old Testament is different from the one described in the New. He published his own list of New Testament books, eliminating all but ten of Paul's letters and a highly edited version of the Gospel of Luke. Marcion was denounced and excommunicated, but the church actually owes a debt to his heresy for at least two reasons. First, his claims forced the early church to respond with a scholarly defense of the New Testament canon. Second, they bear witness to "the traditional place which the Epistles to Timothy and Titus occupied in orthodox circles at Rome about the year 140."⁴

Paul's authorship of the Pastoral Epistles remained a steady tradition in the church until the nineteenth century, when Enlightenment theologians Friedrich Schleiermacher, Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, and Ferdinand Christian Baur called it into question.⁵ Building on this criticism, academics such as P. N. Harrison have rejected Pauline authorship of the Pastorals largely on the basis that they present a historical setting that is difficult to reconcile with the

2. Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, trans. by H. J. Lawlor and J. E. L. Outon (London: SPCK, 1927), 3.3.5.

3. The early church father Tertullian (160–220) records this in his *Against Marcion* 5.21.

4. J. H. Bernard, *The Pastoral Epistles* (1899; repr., Grand Rapids: Thornapple Commentaries, 1980), xviii. For more documentation on the early church's acceptance of the Pastoral Epistles, see Bernard's introduction, xi–xxi; George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 13–14; and Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 3–9.

5. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über den sogenannten ersten Brief des Paulos an den Timotheos* (Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung, 1807); Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, *Historisch-kritische Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (Leipzig: Weidmanischen Buchhandlung, 1812); and Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Die sogenannten Pastoralbriefe des Apostels Paulus aufs neue kritisch untersucht* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1835).

book of Acts and exhibit a literary style, doctrinal themes, and an ecclesiology that is different from Paul's other letters.⁶ In the twentieth century, however, a number of scholars responded persuasively to these arguments, defending the historic position that the apostle Paul authored the Pastoral Epistles.⁷

Date and Setting

Second Timothy is the latest of all Paul's letters, written sometime shortly before his death. Eusebius claims that Paul was martyred during Nero's reign, which ended in 68, although intense persecution began in 64.⁸ This probably places the letter sometime in 64–65, though some would place it as late as 67.

Paul wrote 2 Timothy during his second imprisonment in Rome (1:8). The book of Acts concludes during Paul's first imprisonment, where we find him living under house arrest for two years and with the freedom to receive visitors and even preach the gospel. Many scholars of the New Testament have persuasively argued that Paul was released after this first imprisonment and possibly traveled to Spain before being rearrested and incarcerated for a second time in Rome, an incarceration that ended in martyrdom. The gap between his first and second imprisonments was probably long enough to span at least two winters, seeing that Paul mentions such in 2 Timothy 4:21 and Titus 3:12. His second imprisonment is not recorded by Luke, for Acts does not provide us with a complete history of Paul's apostolic ministry. "It cannot be supposed that the imprisonment mentioned in Acts 28 must have ended in

6. See P. N. Harrison, *The Problem of the Pastorals* (London: Oxford University Press, 1921).

7. See Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1990); William Hendriksen, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957); J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: A & C Black, 1963); Gordon Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, New International Bible Commentary (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1988); Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*; and Mounce, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 46.

8. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.22.

martyrdom, for some explanation would be needed for the writer's omission to mention it. Indeed, the leniency of detention, which seems to have allowed Paul unrestricted visiting, is more suggestive of release than martyrdom."⁹ The setting in 2 Timothy is completely different. Now he is in chains (1:16; 2:9), lonely (4:9–11), awaiting trial after his preliminary hearing (4:16–17), and expecting to be executed (4:6–8). He is without the comfort of books or even a cloak to stay warm (4:13). Moreover, Timothy was with Paul during his first Roman imprisonment, when he wrote the more optimistic letters of Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. This time Timothy is absent, and Paul's tone has changed.

The city of Ephesus is the location of the church Timothy served (1 Tim. 1:3). Although modern Ephesus sits seven miles inland, the city was originally a seaport on the coast of Ionia. It was built in the tenth century BC by Greek colonists and by the time of the Roman Empire became the main city in Asia Minor. It was known for the practice of magic and sorcery, but especially for the worship of the goddess Artemis. The Temple of Artemis (completed around 550 BC) was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World and formed the center of civic and religious life in Ephesus. The temple, coupled with the city's strategic harbor, made Ephesus a wealthy and cosmopolitan metropolis in the centuries leading up to the time of the apostles. It buzzed with energy and was filled with "lovers of themselves, lovers of money" (3:2) and "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (3:4). This was the context in which Timothy labored, a city that was home to the church Paul helped plant years earlier (Acts 18:18–21; 19:1–10).

Pagan religion and materialism, however, were not the only threats to the Ephesian church. When Paul penned this epistle, false teaching about Christianity was advancing aggressively in the city. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul opens with an urgent warning

9. Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles*, 29. For more support on the second Roman imprisonment theory, see Guthrie's introduction to *Pastoral Epistles*, along with Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 11–12.

concerning those who teach deviant doctrines contrary to the truth. His use of the present tense in the verb translated “teach no other doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:3) signifies that false teaching was not a possible future danger to the church in Ephesus but was already happening in the place where Timothy ministered. This teaching seemed to involve an incorrect (and probably quite complex) application of the Mosaic law to Christianity (1:7), incorporating speculative “fables and endless genealogies” (1:4) inspired by “deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” (4:1). It contained a legalistic element that added to the law of God the commandments of men, such as forbidding marriage and requiring people “to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving” (v. 3). *Heresy* is not too strong a word for this doctrine, for it caused some to “have suffered shipwreck” of the faith (1:19). Those promoting this heresy, people such as Hymenaeus, Alexander (v. 20), and Philetus (2 Tim. 2:17), were not merely deceived, but were insincere liars, “having their own conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Tim. 4:2). They were spreading “idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge” (6:20).

Such was the setting in which Timothy labored. Additionally, we find the young pastor discouraged from fighting the good fight against false teaching and disheartened by Paul’s incarceration. He was in need of encouragement and exhortation from his mentor and friend.

Timothy

Who was this person to whom Paul, near the end of his life, wrote this personal letter? The first time we encounter Timothy in the New Testament is in Acts 16, during Paul’s second missionary journey. There, Luke describes him as “the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek,” and that “he was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium” (vv. 1–2). Paul says that Timothy had been acquainted with the Scriptures from childhood (2 Tim. 3:15), probably introduced by his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice (1:5). This does not mean that Timothy

knew the word of God as a Christian, but that he was raised by a Jewish mother who preserved some ties to Judaism and practiced her faith despite being married to a Gentile. Evidently, Paul was instrumental in leading Timothy to Christ, for he calls Timothy his “beloved and faithful son in the Lord” (1 Cor. 4:17), his “true son in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:2), who served him “as a son with his father” (Phil. 2:22). This is language that Paul reserves for those whom he fathered “in Christ Jesus...through the gospel” (1 Cor. 4:15; cf. Philemon 10).

Yet Timothy was more to Paul than a beloved convert; he was a faithful and trusted colleague in the ministry (Rom. 16:21). Paul mentored him (2 Tim. 3:10), took him on missionary journeys (Acts 16:3), and sent him as an apostolic representative to the churches (1 Cor. 4:17; Phil. 2:19; 1 Thess. 3:2). Timothy was with Paul on his climactic trip to Jerusalem (Acts 20:1–5) and during his first imprisonment in Rome (Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; Philemon 1). His name frequently appears in the opening of Paul’s epistles (2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1). Among Paul’s friends and colleagues, Timothy received the highest commendations. He had so proven his worth as a servant of the gospel that Paul was able to say, “I have no one like-minded [like him], who will sincerely care for your state” (Phil. 2:20). He called him “our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith” (1 Thess. 3:2). Indeed, for Paul there was no one like Timothy.

Still, Timothy was not without weaknesses. He was timid by nature and prone to discouragement. Difficult tasks seemed to frighten him. So great was his trepidation that Paul found it necessary to admonish the Corinthians, “if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear,” and “let no one despise him” (1 Cor. 16:10–11). As the pastor of the church at Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3), Timothy felt overwhelmed by the challenges he faced. He was afraid of suffering. His flame had burned low. Paul needed to remind him to “stir up the gift of God” (2 Tim. 1:6) and that “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (1:7).

Another weakness seemed to be his poor health. Timothy suffered from “frequent infirmities,” warranting a medicinal remedy (1 Tim. 5:23). While we cannot be sure of the nature of this sickness, we are told that it was a recurrent problem for Timothy. It may have been a chronic illness that made it difficult for him to fulfill his regular duties of preaching, teaching, and rendering pastoral care.

There was also the matter of Timothy’s age. In the Greco-Roman world, a man was still considered young until about age forty. While we do not know precisely how old Timothy was when Paul wrote this letter, we can be moderately certain that he was still in his thirties. The apostle tells him to “flee also youthful lusts” (2 Tim. 2:22). Only a few years earlier, he said, “Let no one despise your youth” (1 Tim. 4:12). This means he was probably about twenty years old when he first met the apostle in Lystra. Given his enormous responsibilities as the pastor at Ephesus (i.e., setting the church in order, standing up to false teachers, choosing elders and deacons, preaching the word), his young age was a potential liability. This young man would be accountable for carrying forth the gospel after Paul was gone.

Finally, it seems that Timothy was somewhat ashamed of Paul’s imprisonment (2 Tim. 1:8). Here was an apostle of Jesus Christ suffering in prison like a common criminal. By the world’s standards, he did not look successful. If he was truly the bearer of God’s revelation, should not Paul be doing better than he was? Why did it seem as if God had abandoned him? Where was the power of God in Paul’s life? Like most believers, Timothy still wrestled to some degree with a theology of glory. He assumed that if one is blessed by God, one should not suffer. Paul reminds him that the Christian life is patterned after Christ’s life: suffering now, glory later (1:12; 2:8–9; 3:12). He urges Timothy not to be ashamed of him but rather share with him in “the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God” (1:8; cf. 2:3; 4:5). He did not want his beloved child in the faith to abandon him as had Phygellus, Hermogenes, and Demas (1:15; 4:10).

This was Timothy: young, timid, frequently ill, and prone to discouragement. Although he was Paul's most faithful and trusted colleague, his abilities were outmatched by his responsibilities. Paul writes to him so that he might find his strength in the grace of God. Yet he also writes to us. Although Timothy is the primary recipient of this letter, he is not the only person whom Paul sought to instruct by it. The apostle wrote this letter with the broader church in mind. This is clear, at least implicitly, by Paul's using the second person plural pronoun in his benediction: "Grace be with you" (4:22).

Purpose

This letter is a farewell discourse, the last word from a spiritual father to his beloved apprentice. As noted above in the section on date and setting, the church at Ephesus was being attacked by false teaching. The gospel needed to be guarded, and its ministers needed to remain vigilant. The veteran apostle thus gives his younger colleague one final charge to "preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2), remain "watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, [and] fulfill [his] ministry" (4:5). For Paul, this charge was necessary because he was near death (4:6–7), and the time was coming when people "will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (4:3–4). Some years earlier, Paul had predicted to the elders of the church at Ephesus that after his departure "savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:29–30). Sadly, this prediction was already being fulfilled at the time Paul wrote 2 Timothy.

The first three chapters of this letter serve as a long introduction to Paul's main charge to Timothy, which is in 4:1–5. They are filled with instruction, admonition, and encouragement as Paul urges Timothy to use his spiritual gifts for ministry (1:6–7), suffer with him for the gospel (1:8, 11–12; 2:3, 9–10; 3:12), guard the truth (1:13–14),

instruct faithful men who can teach others (2:2), and remain self-disciplined (2:3–5, 15, 20–26; 3:10–14). Paul wants Timothy to heed these commands for the rest of his ministry and life.

There are many farewell discourses found in Scripture: Jacob to his sons (Genesis 49), Moses to Israel (Deuteronomy 32–33), Joshua to the elders and judges (Joshua 24), David to Solomon (1 Kings 2:1–9), and the Lord Jesus to His disciples (John 14–16). All have words of comfort and instruction for the benefit of those who will survive the one saying goodbye. What makes 2 Timothy unique is that it comes near the end of the apostolic era and highlights the transition from the extraordinary ministry of the apostles to the ordinary ministry of local pastors. Just as Pastor Timothy was called to serve as the apostle Paul's representative in the Ephesian congregation, local pastors today are called to preach, teach, and guard the same apostolic gospel.

Nearly a half century ago, John Stott wrote in the introduction to his commentary on 2 Timothy:

The church of our day urgently needs to heed the message of the second letter of Paul to Timothy. For all around us we see Christians and churches relaxing their grasp of the gospel, fumbling it, in danger of letting it drop from their hands altogether. A new generation of young Timothys is needed, who will guard the sacred deposit of the gospel, who are determined to proclaim it and are prepared to suffer for it, and who will pass it on pure and uncorrupted to the generation which in due course will rise up to follow them.¹⁰

Now, some fifty years since Stott penned those words, the urgent need for a new generation of young Timothys has not diminished but only increased. Today the church desperately needs Timothys who will *guard the gospel* against false teaching, *entrust the gospel* to other faithful servants, be willing to *suffer for the gospel* like the apostle Paul, and above all, *preach the gospel* so that people will

10. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 2 Timothy* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1973), 22.

“obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim. 2:10). May God bless the church and the world by raising up a multitude of Timothys so that future generations will discover (and rediscover!) the gospel and apply it to their own times.

Outline

I. Salutation (1:1–2)

II. Encouragement, Warnings, and Instruction (1:3–3:17)

A. Encouragement to Continue in the Ministry of the Gospel (1:3–7)

B. Encouragement to Suffer for the Gospel (1:8–12)

C. Encouragement to Guard the Gospel (1:13–18)

D. Encouragement to Train Up Workmen for the Gospel (2:1–15)

E. Warning about Those Who Oppose the Gospel (2:16–19)

F. Encouragement to Live Consistently with the Gospel (2:20–26)

G. Additional Warnings about Those Who Oppose the Gospel (3:1–9)

H. Instruction about the Authority of the Gospel (3:10–17)

III. Paul’s Main Charge to Timothy (4:1–8)

IV. Final Words (4:9–22)