**Lesson 4 - 2 Timothy 1-2**

**1:1. By the will of God according to the promise of the life which is in Christ Jesus.**  It is difficult for non-Jews to appreciate how central to Paul and to the Jewish Christians was the realization that God’s promises were fulfilled. The Jews, unlike the Gentiles, knew they were God’s people, to whom the Lord had sworn in a covenant that he would be their savior. That was a promise, God’s promise; and now it has been fulfilled. That is basically what Paul means when he says that the gospel reveals the *justice* of God (Rom 1:16–17; NAB: “righteousness”)—that is, not the justice he metes out to sinners but his justice to his own sworn word to save his people. God’s justice, then, is the fulfillment of his promise. Here he describes the promise simply as “life,” a shorter version of “the word of life” in Phil 2:16, where, ironically enough, he speaks of running the race, whose end he contemplates in this letter (2 Tim 4:7). Elsewhere this life is described as eternal (1 Tim 1:16; 6:12; Titus 3:7; John 3:15–16).[[1]](#footnote-1)

**1:2. To Timothy my beloved child.** In the Old Testament, “beloved son” can carry the meaning “only son” or “firstborn” (Gen 22:2, 12, 16), with the right of succeeding the father and receiving the inheritance. Although Paul uses “child” instead of “son,” the idea of succession can hardly be far from his mind, since Timothy will carry on Paul’s work after his death and is already doing so now in Ephesus. **(Ibid.)**

**1:3. I serve/worship with a clear conscience as my fathers did**. The **service/worship** Paul renders to God means a life of prayer and devotion (as in Rom 1:9). Adding **with a clear conscience** may well be an allusion to the injustice done him by his arrest and imprisonment. If he is in prison, it is because he was faithful to his conscience and to his proclamation of the lordship of Jesus. Was he arrested because he was considered to be a troublemaker among the Jews, or was it because hailing Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords was a threat to Nero? At any rate he associates himself with the “cloud of witnesses”—**my fathers/ancestors** — that have gone on before him (Heb 12:1). Paul can only be referring here to his Jewish forebears, who clung to the faith even under persecution and martyrdom. Thanks to them, Paul is blessed to know the fulfillment of what they could only discern dimly, the fulfillment of the promise in Jesus Christ.

**Going Deeper – Traditions, Family And Prayer**

The ancient Gentile world considered the preservation of the traditions of one’s ancestors to be not only a noble thing but also something associated with worship of the gods. Though the Israelites did not worship their ancestors, their worship of the true God was intimately connected with the revelation to their ancestors, as the Lord revealed himself to Moses: “I am the God of your father … the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3:6). The Bible does not relate tales of the gods but stories of human beings to whom God reveals himself. The handing down of the faith from generation to generation forms a distant background for the importance of sacred Tradition as we find it in the Pastorals. Our text also underlines the heritage that Christians owe to the Jews, through whom salvation comes (John 4:22). Though the rapidity of change in our modern world has tended to focus attention more on what lies ahead than on the past, in the Christian community veneration of the great spiritual heroes of the past, the saints, keeps the sacredness of the past before the Church’s eyes and urges fidelity to sacred Tradition in the midst of the turning world.

For Paul, to think of someone is to pray for that person (Phil 1:3). That Paul prays for Timothy **night and day** is another way of saying “unceasingly” or “constantly” (1 Thess 1:2–3; 2:13; see 5:17), fulfilling the Lord’s admonition about being in a perpetual state of prayer (Luke 18:1; 21:36). One can imagine what night was like in a Roman prison, but Paul uses many of those dark hours for intercessory prayer (as he and Silas did at Philippi; Acts 16:25), particularly for his “child” who has replaced him in the care of the Ephesian community. (**Ibid**. pp.138-139)

**1.7. God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control**. The **spirit** given here implies, of course, the Holy Spirit, explicitly named in 1:14. But the immediate sense is the Spirit’s charism for ministry, the bestowal of an interior power ordered to an external mission, such as was prophesied of the messiah in Isaiah 11:2 or of the eschatological/end times prophet in Isaiah 61:1. (Ibid. Montague p. 143)

Fear and timidity, or **cowardice**, have no place in one endowed with this spirit. Already in the Old Testament, the “fear of the Lord” removes human fear: “The spirit of those who fear the Lord will be fully alive … He who fears the Lord will never be afraid” (Sir 34:13–14, see also Ps 27:1). That is because the spirit is one **of power**. This is almost a redundancy, since the word “spirit” implies power and can be used as a synonym for it. It is the power by which Jesus worked miracles (Acts 10:38), a power given to the disciples at Pentecost (1:8) and to Paul himself (Rom 15:19) and manifested in the founding of his new communities (Gal 3:5; 1 Thess 1:5). But it is also a power available for witnessing (Acts 1:8), preaching with boldness, and enduring hardship; this is the charism that Paul wants Timothy to stir up.

But the most characteristic effect of the Holy Spirit is **love** (Rom 5:5), and it is this divine love that inspires hope and consequently endurance (5:2–5). The power given to the minister, then, proceeds from love, leads to love, and is tempered by love. Or better, it is the very power of love itself. On the one hand, it is different from the blustering kind of authoritarianism that governs by fear. On the other hand, it is not soft or subject to manipulation or weathervane subservience. In a leader it can be the most compelling power of all.

The third element of this triad is **self-control** (*sōphronsynē*). A series of Greek words cluster around the notion of self-control, prudence, wisdom, decency. Paul expects all Christians to exert self-control over their passions (Gal 5:23). Some scholars suggest the Greek ‘*sōphronsynē* ’ be translated closer to its root meaning of ‘making wise’, that it would be better rendered “prudence,” in the sense of balance, levelheadedness, not going to one extreme or another, the kind of virtue especially needed of leaders, indeed of bishops (1 Tim 3:2–3; Titus 1:8). The pastor needs to model the kind of balance he expects of his flock. He needs to be measured in his judgment, listening well but not remaining voiceless when error and sin need to be condemned. Symbol and leader of unity, he needs the kind of spirit that will promote reconciliation and the practice of truth in love (Eph 4:15). In Titus 2:4 the verb form *sōphronizō*, related to our noun translated “self-control,” means “to teach, to form others.” Thus the word is related to the bishop’s responsibility to teach (1 Tim 4:11; 6:2b; 2 Tim 2:24). Mature and formed himself, he will be able to teach and form others.

When we look at the triad “power, love, self-control” as a whole, it is remarkable that the most important, love, occupies the center. It is like the fuselage of a plane, which rides on two wings that balance each other. The gift of the Spirit is one of power, but it is also the spirit of order, and it is both because it is the spirit of love. (**Ibid**. Montague pp.143-145)

**Going Deeper – The Wisdom of Ben Sira Concerning Fear**

Ben Sira ultimately attributes his deliverance from danger not to his own cleverness but to the Lord, whom he fears. He describes the blessings of those who fear the Lord and trust in him (34:13–17). The spirit of those who fear the Lord will live, even when faced with life-threatening dangers, for their hope is firmly rooted not in elusive dreams (34:1) but in God, who saves them. One who fears the Lord is neither timid nor a coward but finds great courage in God and thus does not fear life’s perils, for the Lord is his hope (see the commentary on 2:15–18). For this reason, blessed is the soul of one who fears the Lord: this person steadfastly looks to God and relies on him as his only support. The fear of the Lord is not a servile fear but a deep reverence that elicits God’s blessings (Ps 112:1–9).[[2]](#footnote-2)

**1:9. Called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of/according to our works**. Paul, whose struggle with his fellow Jews was long and bitter over “works” and “grace,” could hardly pass up the opportunity of repeating that it was not **our** **works** that merited salvation, for God planned from all eternity to grace us with his mercy in Christ Jesus. Second Timothy 1:9–10 sounds very much like Eph 1:1–10. Calling and choosing us was not a second thought on God’s part. He always had it in his heart. That **grace** was **given**/**bestowed on us in Christ Jesus**, for it is only in union with him that we receive it: the only begotten was “full of grace.… From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace” (John 1:14–16).

**1:10. Now has manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished/destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel**. God has now revealed the secret of his heart **through the appearance of our savior Christ Jesus**. The role of “savior,” used of God in the preceding verse, is applied here to Christ. Paul frequently coordinates the actions of God with those of Christ. (**Ibid**. Montague pp. 147-148)

The effects of appearance of **our savior Christ Jesus** in time are twofold. One is to rob death of its power: he **abolished/destroyed death**. It is possible to give the Greek verb the strong sense “to destroy or annihilate” (2 Thess 2:8), but the root meaning of the word has the nuance “to render inoperable or disable.” Like a disabled tank, death is still there, but it has no power, thanks to Christ’s victory. It is permanently “out of service.” This is an important shade of meaning, for Christians do not live in the illusion that physical death does not exist. It is real. But because of Jesus it no longer poses the threat it once did. Since death has no more power over Jesus (Rom 6:9), when Christians die “with him” (2 Tim 2:11), or “for the Lord” (Rom 14:8), they experience death in a radically different way than they would have as unbelievers.

They are no longer slaves to the paralysis that the certainty of death brings. Paul even personalizes death in this passage (as his use of the definite article in “*the* death” indicates), suggesting that Christ has had a personal encounter with the enemy, the devil (whose work is death; John 8:44). As the letter to the Hebrews puts it, Christ came “that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who through fear of death had been subject to slavery all their life” (Heb 2:14–15).

The second effect of Christ’s ministry was to give life, and Paul describes it in the mode of revelation: **brought life and immortality to light**. He sees the risen Christ, light of the world (John 8:12), radiating the light of the resurrection through the darkness that could not restrain it (1:5) and showing that God has destined humankind not only for immortality but for incorruptibility, the quality of the risen body (1 Cor 15:42–54). “He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body” (Phil 3:21). “Life and immortality” could be translated “an incorruptible life.” This illumination is not, therefore, enlightenment in a merely intellectual or spiritual sense, and certainly not in a Buddhist or New Age sense, which is impersonal and wholly subjective. It is rather the gift of incorruptible spiritual and bodily life, the resurrection, for which the gospel presents the guarantee. Paul’s faith and hope enable him to experience something of that light even if he is in the darkness of a Roman prison. That light contacts the human race **through the gospel**, the proclamation of the good news, which Paul sees continuing despite his being in chains (2 Tim 2:9). (**Ibid**. p. 149)

**Going Deeper – More on the effect of the appearance of Christ, an epiphany?**

Paul’s choice of the words **manifest**, **appearance**, and **brought … to light** contrasts with the plan “before time began,” which for ages God kept secret. Instead of using a more traditional phrase like “God sent his Son,” Paul wants to emphasize that what was hidden from eternity is now revealed. Paul elsewhere calls God’s plan the “mystery” (1 Cor 2:7; 15:51; Eph 1:9; 3:9; etc.). Unlike the secret rites of the mystery religions, the mystery that was once concealed in God’s mind is now revealed and is in the process of reaching the whole world, like the morning sun that touches the mountaintop and will eventually reach the deepest valley. Paul uses the term *epiphaneia* (“epiphany”) for this **appearance**, thus taking the term earlier used for Christ’s glorious manifestation at the end of time (“manifestation” in 2 Thess 2:8; “appearance” in 1 Tim 6:14) and applying it to the incarnation or to the whole of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. This is “realized eschatology,” that is, the transfer of an end-time expectation to the present. The Greek word *epiphaneia* was frequently used for a visible manifestation of a hidden divinity. It was at Ephesus precisely that the city council in AD 48 acclaimed Julius Caesar as “the God made *manifest* … and common *saviour* of human life.” The Ephesian Christians would therefore have been thoroughly familiar with this language when it was applied to Christ. It was a daring thing to apply such imperial titles to Christ, as the Romans would take seriously any threat to their emperor. (**Ibid**.)

**1:18. May the Lord grant mercy.** Short of betrayal, perhaps the greatest human suffering is that of being abandoned by one’s friends when we are in a desperate situation. By the same token, those who remain faithful to us are all the more deeply cherished. If a friend of ours were arrested and jailed, would we visit them, or would we shun them out of fear of looking bad?

**2:3-7. Take your share of suffering as a good soldier**. The metaphors of the three professions—**soldier**, “athlete,” and “farmer”—were used in the literature of the times for lives that demand self-sacrifice and hard labor. (**Ibid**. pp. 155-157)

**2:8.** **Remember Jesus Christ.** It may seem strange that Paul would tell Timothy to **remember Jesus Christ**. But remembering here, as so often in the Bible, is not merely a calling to mind. It is the fixing of one’s attention, an activation of faith in the mystery. In the midst of pastoral problems it is possible to forget the very person who has inspired such a revolutionary faith in the first place. Whereas elsewhere in the Pastorals Paul habitually speaks of “Christ Jesus,” here he reverses the order of names and places “Jesus” first, thus highlighting the humanity of the savior. He then quotes what is probably an early creedal formula that was the heart of the earliest *kērygma*: **Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David** (see also Rom 1:3–4). Descent from David was important to prove the Christian claim that Jesus was the Messiah, fulfilling the prophecies of Nathan (2 Sam 7:12; Isa 11:1; Jer 23:5). The resurrection was his solemn enthronement at God’s right hand, fulfilling beyond expectations the messianic promises of the Old Testament: “The Lord said to my Lord, / ‘Sit at my right hand’ ” (Acts 2:34). **Such is my gospel** means: “This is the gospel I preach, and this is the gospel you must attend to.”

**2:10. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect/those chosen.** This is not the first time, of course, that the apostle has had to confront the mystery of his call to itinerant preaching being stifled by finding himself in a criminal’s chains (“far more imprisonments” in 2 Cor 11:23). Philippi (Acts 16:16–24), Ephesus (probably the site of his prison letter to the Philippians; see Phil 1:7), Jerusalem (Acts 21:33), Caesarea (23:31–26:32), and Rome itself in an earlier imprisonment had given him plenty of occasion to meditate on the mystery. Paul spent nearly half his ministry in jail! And mystery indeed it is. And yet, like Jesus, he knew that when death was at work in him, life was at work in his people (2 Cor 4:12), that he was filling up what was lacking in the afflictions of Christ for his body, the Church (Col 1:24).

**Going Deeper – Promoting the Gospel and the Kingdom**

There are two ways a Christian, and especially a Christian minister, can promote the gospel and the kingdom: by work and by suffering. And who is to say that work is more effective than suffering, if suffering is one’s call and is borne in union with Christ? It is part of the mystery that Jesus redeemed the world ultimately not by preaching, teaching, and healing, but by suffering unto death. To the flesh, promoting the gospel by suffering seems nonsense, a waste, a diminishment, a defeat. To the Spirit, it is God’s secret weapon. But it takes faith to use it.

On the campus where I work there is a retirement and nursing facility, where my Marianist brothers endure in faith the physical and emotional suffering that signals their imminent death. On that same campus I spend my daily energies teaching, preaching, counseling students, and giving the sacraments. Who, ultimately, is promoting the kingdom better? God’s way of judging is not our way.

I once met a retired Jesuit at a retreat house. I had earlier noticed that he limped, the result of a stroke. He had had a very prestigious career, even serving on the General Administration of the order. When I had the occasion to sit next to him at table, I asked, with the naïveté of a busy young priest, “And what do you do now, Father?” His firm, unabashed reply astounded and confounded me: “I say my prayers, and I wait.” (**Ibid**. pp. 161-163)

**2:22–26.** This passage contains valuable pastoral advice, especially for those who tend to make everything a matter of debate and thereby sow confusion among the faithful. They are an appeal for patience and serenity; when faced with error one should try to bring the other person round to the truth, and do everything one can to avoid a break and the consequent danger of people being lost to the Church.

In his homily on this text, St John Chrysostom calls for patience, even if opponents are slow to listen to correction: “It very often happens that, if teaching is kept up, one’s words do manage to reach the center of a person’s soul, the way the plough enters the soil, and cut the very roots of the passion which was preventing it from being fertile. Through hearing the word, results will come. It cannot be that the word of the Gospel, if listened to continuously, will fail to work. If one did not take that into account, (the teacher) could easily give up his effort in a moment of dejection and lose everything” (*Hom. on 2 Tim*, ad loc.).[[3]](#footnote-3)

1. Montague, G. T. (2008). [*First and Second Timothy, Titus*](https://ref.ly/logosres/cathcomm75ti?ref=BibleNAB.2Ti1.1&off=779&ctx=cts+1%3a8%3b+Gal+3%3a14).%0a~It+is+difficult+for+) (P. S. Williamson & M. Healy, Eds.; p. 137). Baker Academic. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Villeneuve, A. (2025). [*Sirach*](https://ref.ly/logosres/cathcomm44sir?ref=Bible.Sir34.13-15&off=11&ctx=(51%3a13).%0a%5b34%3a13%E2%80%9315%5d%0a~Ben+Sira+ultimately+) (M. Healy, M. Giszczak, & P. S. Williamson, Eds.; p. 262). Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [*Saint Paul’s Letters to the Thessalonians, and Pastoral Letters*](https://ref.ly/logosres/navarrentstandard73th?ref=Bible.2Ti2.22-26&off=32&ctx=ards+those+in+error%0a~2%3a22%E2%80%9326.+This+passag) (pp. 116–117). (2005). Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishing. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)