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JOHN R. W. STOTT

The Message of

2 Timothy

THE NEW TESTAMENT SERIES EDITOR: JOHN R. W. STOTT

The Message of 2 Timothy
Guard the gospel

John Stott

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General preface

THE BIBLE SPEAKS TODAY describes three series of expositions, based on the books of the Old and New Testaments, and on Bible themes that run through the whole of Scripture. Each series is characterized by a threefold ideal:

- to expound the biblical text with accuracy
- to relate it to contemporary life, and
- to be readable.

These books are, therefore, not ‘commentaries’, for the commentary seeks rather to elucidate the text than to apply it, and tends to be a work rather of reference than of literature. Nor, on the other hand, do they contain the kinds of ‘sermons’ that attempt to be contemporary and readable without taking Scripture seriously enough. The contributors to *The Bible Speaks Today* series are all united in their convictions that God still speaks through what he has spoken, and that nothing is more necessary for the life, health and growth of Christians than that they should hear what the Spirit is saying to them through his ancient—yet ever modern—Word.

ALEC MOTYER
JOHN STOTT
DEREK TIDBALL
Series editors

Preface

During the gestation of this book I seem to have lived inside this second letter of Paul to Timothy. In imagination I have sat down beside Timothy and have tried myself to hear and heed this final charge from the ageing apostle. I have also tried to share its message with many people: with the congregation of All Souls Church, Langham Place, in the autumn of 1967; with about 9,000 students at the great Urbana missionary conference in the United States in December 1967; with those attending the 1969 Keswick Convention; with groups of pastors at various times in America, Wales, Ireland, New Zealand, Australia and Singapore; and with some Anglican bishops before the 1968 Lambeth Conference. On each occasion I have been impressed afresh by the timeliness for today of what the apostle writes, especially for young Christian leaders. For our era too is one of theological and moral confusion, even of apostasy. And the apostle summons us, as he summoned Timothy, to be strong, brave and steadfast.

The words which crystallize the letter for me are the two little monosyllables *su de* ('but as for you'), which occur four times. Timothy is called to be different. He is not to yield to the pressures of public opinion or conform to the spirit of his age, but rather to stand firm in the truth and the righteousness of God. In my judgment nothing is more needed by Christians in today's world and church than this same courage.

I express my warm gratitude to my secretary, Frances Whitehead, for her efficient and tireless labours during the past seventeen years, not least in the typing of innumerable manuscripts. She is not likely to forget this one, since it was the indirect cause of an accident which involved her in the pain of a dislocated toe!

J. R. W. STOTT
1972

Chief Abbreviations

- AG *A Greek—English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (University of Chicago Press and Cambridge University Press, 1957).
- Alford *The Greek Testament, a Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, by Henry Alford. Vol. III (Rivington, Fourth edition, 1865).
- AV *The Authorized (King James’) Version* of the Bible, 1611.
- Barrett *The Pastoral Epistles* by C. K. Barrett (*The New Clarendon Bible*, Oxford University Press, 1963).
- Calvin *The Epistles of Paul to Timothy and Titus* by John Calvin, 1548 (Oliver and Boyd, 1964).
- Ellicott *The Pastoral Epistles of St. Paul* by C. J. Ellicott, 1861 (Longmans, Fourth Edition, 1869).
- Eusebius *The Ecclesiastical History* by Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, 4th century AD. Translated by H. J. Lawlor and J. E. L. Oulton (S.P.C.K., 1927).
- Fairbairn *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* by Patrick Fairbairn, 1874 (Oliphants and Zondervan, 1956).
- Guthrie *The Pastoral Epistles* by Donald Guthrie (*Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Tyndale Press and Eerdmans, 1957).
- Hanson *The Pastoral Letters* by A. T. Hanson (*The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible*, Cambridge University Press, 1966).
- Hendriksen *The Epistles to Timothy and Titus* by William Hendriksen (Baker Book House, 1957 and Banner of Truth Trust, 1959).
- JB *The Jerusalem Bible* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966).
- JBP *The New Testament in Modern English* by J. B. Phillips (Collins, 1958).
- LS *Greek—English Lexicon* compiled by H. G. Liddell and R. Scott. New Edition by H. S. Jones (Oxford University Press, 1925–40).
- Lock *The Pastoral Epistles, a Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, by Walter Lock (*The International Critical Commentary*, T. and T. Clark, 1924).
- MM *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* by J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, 1930 (Hodder and Stoughton, 1949).
- Moule *The Second Epistle to Timothy* by Handley C. G. Moule (*The Devotional Commentary* series, Religious Tract Society, 1905).
- NEB *The New English Bible* (New Testament, 1961; Old Testament, 1970).
- Plummer *The Pastoral Epistles* by Alfred Plummer (*The Expositor’s Bible*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1888).
- RSV *The Revised Standard Version* of the Bible (New Testament, 1946; Old Testament, 1952; revised edition, 1971).
- Simpson *The Pastoral Epistles* by E. K. Simpson (Tyndale Press, 1954).
- White *The Pastoral Epistles* by Newport J. D. White (*The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1910).

Introduction

Bishop Handley Moule confessed that he found it difficult to read Paul's second letter to Timothy 'without finding something like a mist gathering in the eyes'.¹ Understandably so. It is a very moving human document.

We are to imagine the apostle, 'Paul the aged', languishing in some dark, dank dungeon in Rome, from which there is to be no escape but death. His own apostolic labours are over. 'I have finished the race,' he can say. But now he must make provision for the faith after he has gone, and especially for its transmission (uncontaminated, unalloyed) to future generations. So he sends Timothy this most solemn charge. He is to preserve what he has received, at whatever cost, and to hand it on to faithful men who in their turn will be able to teach others also (2:2).

In order to grasp the letter's message and feel its full impact, it is necessary to understand the background against which it was written. Four points need to be made.

1. This is a genuine letter of Paul to Timothy

The genuineness of the three Pastoral Epistles was almost universally accepted in the early church. Allusions to them occur possibly in the Corinthian letter of Clement of Rome as early as c. AD 95, probably in the letters of Ignatius and Polycarp during the first decades of the second century, and certainly in the works of Irenaeus towards the end of the century. The Muratorian Canon, which dates from about AD 200, ascribes all three letters to the apostle Paul. The only exception to this testimony is the heretic Marcion who was excommunicated in AD 144 in Rome. But he had theological reasons for rejecting these (and other) New Testament letters, and Tertullian expressed surprise that he had omitted the Pastorals from his canon. Eusebius in the fourth century included them among 'the fourteen epistles of Paul' which 'are manifest and clear (as regards their genuineness)', the fourteenth being the Epistle to the Hebrews which (he added) some rejected as not Pauline.²

This external witness to the authenticity of the Pastoral Epistles continued as an unbroken tradition until in 1807 F. Schleiermacher repudiated 1 Timothy, and in 1835 F. C. Baur rejected 2 Timothy and Titus as well. Since then scholars have ranged themselves on each side of the debate, and the Pastorals have had both powerful critics and doughty champions. For an elaborate critique the reader is referred to P. N. Harrison's *The Problem of the Pastorals* (1921), and for a careful defence of the traditional Pauline authorship to the commentaries by William Hendriksen (pp. 4–33) and Donald Guthrie (pp. 12–52 and 212–228). The issues can only be sketched here.

The right place to begin is to recognize that in the first verse of each of the three letters the writer advances a clear and solemn claim to be the apostle Paul. He goes on to refer to his former persecuting zeal (1 Tim. 1:12–17), to his conversion and commission as an apostle (1 Tim. 1:11; 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11) and to his sufferings for Christ (e.g. 2 Tim. 1:12; 2:9, 10; 3:10, 11). More than that, the personality of the apostle seems to permeate these letters. Handley Moule wrote of 2 Timothy: '*The human heart* is in it everywhere. And fabricators, certainly of that age, did not well understand the human heart.'³ Hence even those who deny the Pauline authorship of these letters tend to believe that the writer has incorporated genuine Pauline fragments in his work.

The first ground on which the Pauline authorship of the Pastorals is questioned is *historical*. It is argued that since they mention visits by Paul to Ephesus and Macedonia (1 Tim. 1:3), Crete and Nicopolis (Tit. 1:5; 3:12), Troas, Miletus and Rome (2 Tim. 1:17; 4:13, 20) which cannot be reconciled with Luke's record in Acts of the apostle's journeys, therefore these must be the author's fabrication or at best genuine visits which he has ingeniously misplaced. But if the apostle was released from his Roman imprisonment and then resumed his travels (as he expected and tradition says), before being re-arrested, it is perfectly possible to reconstruct the order of events (as we shall soon see) without any need to accuse the author of fiction or romance.

The second argument is *literary*. Critics reject the Pauline authorship of the Pastorals on the ground that much of their vocabulary is absent from the other ten letters attributed to Paul (and some from the whole New Testament), while many characteristic Pauline expressions in those ten letters are absent from the Pastorals. There are plenty of 'Paulinisms' in the Pastorals, however, both of style and of language, and the changes of time, situation and subject-matter are sufficient to account for the peculiarities. 'Great souls are not their own mimes,' as E. K. Simpson justly comments.⁴

The third and *theological* argument takes various forms. Some claim that the God of the earlier Pauline letters (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) and the grace-faith-salvation-works syndrome have become subtly changed and no longer ring true. But there can be no doubt that the Pastorals set forth the electing, redeeming initiative of 'God our Saviour' who has given his Son to die as our ransom and to rise again, and who now justifies us by his grace and regenerates us by his Spirit, in order that we may live a new life of good works. Others urge that the prevalent heresy which lies behind the Pastorals—its denial of the resurrection, its love of asceticism, its 'myths' and its 'genealogies'—is the developed Gnosticism of the second century, perhaps of Marcion himself. This conjecture ignores, however, the *Jewish* aspects of the heresy (e.g. Tit. 1:10, 14; 3:9; 1 Tim. 1:3–11) and its evident similarities to the Colossian heresy to which the apostle has already addressed himself a year or two previously.

The fourth argument is *ecclesiastical*, namely that the church structures envisaged in the Pastorals are those of the second century, including the monarchical episcopate to which Bishop Ignatius of Antioch referred in his letters. Some critics go further and find the whole atmosphere of the Pastorals too 'churchy' for Paul. Ernst Käsemann⁵ quotes Martin Dibelius as having once said that the Pastoral Epistles 'mark the beginning of the bourgeois outlook in the church'. He adds that he cannot himself regard as Pauline letters in which the church has become 'the central theme of theology', 'the

gospel is domesticated' and Paul's image is 'heavily daubed by church piety'.^[6] One can only reply that this is an extremely subjective judgment. Paul's earliest letters already give evidence of a high doctrine of the church and the ministry, and Luke tells us that it was his policy to ordain elders in every church from his first missionary journey onwards (Acts 14:23). That he should have developed this further in the Pastorals, with instructions about the selection and appointment of ministers, the worship of the church and the maintenance of doctrine, is entirely understandable. But the church and ministry he describes are still recognizably the same, and there is no monarchical episcopate or threefold ministry yet, because 'bishops' and 'elders' are still the same order.

Consequently, the conclusion of many scholars is still that the arguments which have been advanced to deny the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles—historical, literary, theological and ecclesiastical—are not sufficient to overthrow the evidence, both external and internal, which authenticates them as genuine letters addressed by the apostle Paul to Timothy and Titus.

2. The Paul who wrote it was a prisoner in Rome

He describes himself as 'our Lord's prisoner' (1:8), and this was his second Roman imprisonment. He was not now enjoying the comparative freedom and comfort of his own hired house, in which Luke takes leave of him at the end of the Acts and from which he seems to have been set free, as he expected. Instead, he was incarcerated in some 'dismal underground dungeon with a hole in the ceiling for light and air'.^[7] Perhaps it was the Mamertine prison, as tradition says. But wherever he was, Onesiphorus succeeded in finding him only after a painstaking search (1:17). He was certainly in chains (1:16), 'wearing fetters like a criminal' (2:9). He was also suffering acutely from the loneliness, the boredom and the cold of prison life (4:9–13). The preliminary hearing of his case had already taken place (4:16, 17). Now he was awaiting the full trial, but was not expecting to be acquitted. Death appeared to him inevitable (4:6–8). How had this come about?

It seems that, after being released from his earlier imprisonment (the house arrest in Rome described at the end of Acts), Paul 'again journeyed on the ministry of preaching'.^[8] He went to Crete where he left Titus behind (Tit. 1:5), and then to Ephesus where he left Timothy behind (1 Tim. 1:3, 4). He may well have gone on to Colosse to see Philemon, as he had planned (Phm. 22), and he certainly reached Macedonia (1 Tim. 1:3). Of the Macedonian cities he visited, one will have been Philippi (Phil. 2:24). From Macedonia he addressed his first letter to Timothy in Ephesus and his letter to Titus in Crete. He told Titus his intention to spend the winter at Nicopolis (Tit. 3:12), a town in Epirus on the west (Adriatic) coast of Greece. Presumably he did this, and presumably, as he requested, Titus joined him there. If the apostle was ever able to fulfil his great ambition to evangelize Spain (Rom. 15:24, 28), it must have been in the following spring that he set sail. Clement of Rome in his famous letter to the Corinthians (chapter 5) said that Paul had 'come to the extreme limit of the west'. He may have been referring only to Italy, but an allusion to Gaul or Spain—and even Britain (as some have suggested)—seems more likely.

It is safe to assume that he later kept his promise to revisit Timothy in Ephesus (1 Tim. 3:14, 15). From there his itinerary seems to have taken him to the nearby port of Miletus, where he had to leave Trophimus behind ill (2 Tim. 4:20), to Troas (the port from which he had first set sail for Europe) where he stayed with Carpus and left his cloak and some books behind (2 Tim. 4:13), to Corinth where Erastus left the party (2 Tim. 4:20; cf. Rom. 16:23), and so to Rome. Somewhere on this journey he must have been re-arrested. Was it at Troas, explaining why he had no opportunity to collect his personal belongings together but had to leave them behind in Carpus' house? Or was it only when he reached Rome? We do not know the circumstances. But we do know that he was again arrested and again imprisoned, that this time he had to endure great hardship, and that there was to be no escape. For the Neronian persecution was in full swing (AD 64). And the tradition is likely to be correct that Paul was condemned to death and then beheaded (as a Roman citizen would have been) on the Ostian Way about three miles outside the city. Eusebius quotes Dionysius of Corinth that Paul and Peter 'were martyred both on the same occasion', though he adds that Paul's execution was by beheading and Peter's (at his own request) by crucifixion 'head-downwards'.^[9]

Shortly before he died, during his further and more severe imprisonment, Paul sent this second message to Timothy. His execution seemed to him imminent, so that he was writing under its shadow. Although it was an intensely personal communication to his young friend Timothy, it was also—and consciously—his last will and testament to the church.

3. The Timothy, to whom the letter was addressed, was being thrust into a position of responsible Christian leadership far beyond his natural capacity

For over 15 years, since he had first been recruited in his home town Lystra, Timothy had been Paul's faithful missionary companion. He had travelled with him throughout most of the second and third missionary journeys and had been sent during them as a trusted apostolic delegate on several special missions, e.g. to Thessalonica and Corinth (1 Thes. 3:1 ff.; 1 Cor. 4:17). He had then accompanied Paul to Jerusalem (Acts 20:1–5) and may have been with him on the perilous voyage to Rome. At all events, he was certainly in Rome during the first imprisonment, for the apostle bracketed Timothy's name with his own when he wrote the prison Epistles to Philemon, the Philippians and the Colossians (Phm. 1; Phil. 1:1; 2:19–24; Col. 1:1).

It is not just that Paul had a strong affection for Timothy as a friend whom he had evidently led to Christ, so that he could call him his 'beloved and faithful child in the Lord' (1 Cor. 4:17). It is also that he had grown to trust Timothy as his 'fellow-worker' (Rom. 16:21) and his 'brother and God's servant in the gospel of Christ' (1 Thes. 3:2). Indeed, because

of Timothy's genuine concern for the welfare of the churches and because of the loyalty with which 'as a son with a father' he had served with Paul in the gospel, Paul could go so far as to say 'I have no one like him' (Phil. 2:20–22). Among all Paul's associates Timothy was unique.

It is not surprising, therefore, that when the first imprisonment was over Paul left Timothy in Ephesus as the accepted leader of the church, a kind of embryonic 'bishop'. Wide responsibilities were given him: to combat the heretics who were troubling the church there, to order the church's worship, to select and ordain its elders, to regularize the relief and ministry of its widows, to command and teach the apostolic faith, together with the moral duties which flow from it.^[10] And now still heavier burdens were about to fall on Timothy's shoulders. For Paul was on the point of martyrdom, and then the task of preserving the apostle's teaching intact would be his in yet greater measure. Yet, humanly speaking, Timothy was hopelessly unfit to assume these weighty responsibilities of leadership in the church.

For one thing, Timothy was still comparatively young. Paul had urged him in his first letter: 'let no one despise your youth' (1 Tim. 4:12). And in his second letter a year or two later he warned him to 'shun *youthful* passions' (2 Tim. 2:22). We do not know his precise age. If he had been about 20 years old when Paul enrolled him as a missionary associate, he would be in his mid-thirties now. This period of life was regarded as belonging to youth, 'for there were only two recognized standards of age to the Greek or Roman, *neos* and *gerōn*, *juvenis* and *senex*, and the former of these conveyed no such juvenile implication as our term *youngster* ... It was employed of adults in the full vigour of life and of soldiers of military age to the verge of forty.'^[11] Certainly the thirties would be a young age for such church leadership as had been committed to Timothy.

Next, Timothy was prone to illness. In his first letter to him the apostle referred to his 'frequent ailments', though without specifying what they were. He went on to recommend a tonic. For his stomach's sake, he advised, he should give up drinking only water and try a little wine as well (1 Tim. 5:23).

Thirdly, Timothy was timid by temperament. He seems to have been naturally shy. If he had lived in our generation, I think we would have described him as an 'introvert'. He evidently shrank from difficult tasks, so that Paul in writing to the Corinthians had to pave the way for his mission: 'When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you.' Again, 'let no one despise him' (1 Cor. 16:10, 11). Several times in this second letter which the apostle wrote him, he exhorted him to take his share of suffering and not to be afraid or ashamed, since God had not given us a spirit of cowardice (*e.g.* 2 Tim. 1:7, 8; 2:1, 3; 3:12; 4:5). These admonitions were evidently necessary. Paul knew Timothy's weaknesses. He could not forget his tears when they had parted (2 Tim. 1:4). In Fairbairn's words, Timothy was 'disposed to lean rather than to lead'.^[12]

This, then, was Timothy—young in years, frail in physique, retiring in disposition—who nevertheless was called to exacting responsibilities in the church of God. Greatness was being thrust upon him, and like Moses and Jeremiah and a host of others before and after him, Timothy was exceedingly reluctant to accept it. Is someone who is reading these pages in a similar situation? You are young and weak and shy, and yet God is calling you to leadership? This letter has a special message for all timid Timothys.

4. Paul's preoccupation in writing to Timothy was with the gospel, the deposit of truth which had been revealed and committed to him by God

The apostle's own career of gospel-work was virtually over. For 30 years or so he had faithfully preached the good news, planted churches, defended the truth and consolidated the work. Truly, he had 'fought the good fight, ... finished the race, ... kept the faith' (2 Tim. 4:7). Now nothing awaited him but the victor's wreath at the winning post. A prisoner now, he would be a martyr soon.

But what would happen to the gospel when he was dead and gone? The emperor Nero, bent on suppressing all secret societies, and misunderstanding the nature of the Christian church, seemed determined to destroy it. Heretics appeared to be on the increase. There had recently been an almost total Asian apostasy from Paul's teaching (2 Tim. 1:15). Bishop Moule goes so far as to write that 'Christianity ... trembled, *humanly speaking*, on the verge of annihilation'.^[13] Who, then, would do battle for the truth when Paul had laid down his life? This was the question which dominated and vexed his mind as he lay in chains, and to which in this letter he addressed himself. Already in his first letter he had pleaded with Timothy to keep safe the deposit: 'O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you' (1 Tim. 6:20). But since then the situation had worsened. So the apostle's appeal became more urgent. He reminded Timothy that the precious gospel was now committed to *him*, and that it was now *his* turn to assume responsibility for it, to preach and teach it, to defend it against attack and against falsification, and to ensure its accurate transmission to the generations yet to come. In each chapter Paul returned to the same basic concern, or some aspect of it. Indeed, we may summarize the message of the letter in terms of a fourfold charge:

[Chapter 1: The charge to guard the gospel.](#)

Guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us (1:14).

[Chapter 2: The charge to suffer for the gospel.](#)

Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ ... Remember Jesus Christ ... as preached in my gospel, the gospel for which I am suffering and wearing fetters like a criminal (2:3, 8, 9).

[Chapter 3: The charge to continue in the gospel.](#)

Evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed ... (3:13, 14).

[Chapter 4: The charge to proclaim the gospel.](#)

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus ...: preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching (4:1, 2).

The church of our day urgently needs to heed the message of this 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.

Chapter 1

The Charge to Guard the Gospel

Before the apostle reaches the principal theme of this chapter, the charge to Timothy not to be ashamed of the gospel but rather to guard it safely (verses 8–14), he begins his letter with the customary personal greeting (1, 2), followed by a thanksgiving (3–5) and an exhortation (6–8). In this opening paragraph we are introduced in a very vivid way to both Paul and Timothy, the writer and the recipient of the letter. In particular, we are told something of how each man had come to be what he was. These verses throw light on the providence of God, on how God fashions men into what he wants them to be.

1. Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus (verse 1)

In styling himself ‘an apostle of Christ Jesus’ Paul is advancing a considerable claim for himself. He is in fact ranking himself with the Twelve whom Jesus personally selected out of the wider company of his disciples. To them he gave the special title ‘apostles’ (Lk. 6:13), indicating that he intended to send them out on their mission to represent him and to teach in his name. In order to equip them for this role, he arranged for them to be ‘with him’ (Mk. 3:14). They would thus have unrivalled opportunities to hear his words and see his works, and so be in a position to bear witness to him and to everything they had seen and heard of him (Jn. 15:27). He also promised them an extraordinary inspiration of the Holy Spirit to remind them of what he had taught them and to lead them into all the truth which he had not been able to teach them (Jn. 14:25, 26; 16:12, 13).

To this select group Paul claims that he was later added. He saw the risen Lord on the Damascus road, which gave him the qualification every apostle needed, to be a witness to the resurrection (Acts 1:21–26; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8, 9). Indeed, his Damascus road experience was more than his conversion; it was his commissioning as an apostle. Christ said to him: ‘I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles—to whom I send you to open their eyes ...’ (Acts 26:16–18). For the Lord’s words ‘I send you’ were *egō apostellō se* ‘I apostle you’, that is, ‘I appoint you the apostle to the Gentiles’ (cf. Rom. 11:13; Gal. 1:15, 16; 2:9).

This commissioning Paul could never forget. He defended his apostolic mission and message against all his detractors, insisting that his apostleship came from Christ and not from men (e.g. Gal. 1:1, 11, 12). Even now, at the moment of writing, humiliated by men and awaiting the emperor’s pleasure, this common prisoner is a privileged apostle of Christ Jesus, the King of kings.

Paul goes on to describe his apostleship in two ways, reminding Timothy of both its origin and its object.

Its origin was ‘the will of God’. He has used identical words (*diá thelēmatos theou*) at the beginning of both his letters to Corinth and of the two prison letters to the Ephesians and Colossians. Indeed, in nine out of thirteen of his letters, including his first (to the Galatians) and his last (this one to Timothy), he refers either to the ‘will’ or the ‘call’ or the ‘command’ of God by which he had been made an apostle. It was his sustained conviction, from the beginning to the end of his apostolic career, that his appointment as an apostle had come neither from the church, nor from any man or group of men. Nor was he self-appointed. On the contrary, his apostleship originated in the eternal will and historical call of almighty God through Jesus Christ.

The object of his apostleship concerns ‘the promise of the life which is in Christ Jesus’. That is to say, he had been commissioned as an apostle first to formulate and then to communicate the gospel. And the gospel is good news for dying sinners that God has promised them life in Jesus Christ. It seems particularly appropriate that, as death stares the apostle in the face, he should here define it as a ‘promise of life’. For this is what it is. The gospel offers men life—true life, eternal life—both here and hereafter. It declares that this life is ‘in Christ Jesus’, who not only said he was himself the life (Jn. 14:6) but, as Paul will soon elaborate, actually ‘abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel’ (10).

The gospel does more than ‘offer’ life; it ‘promises’ life to all who are in Christ. It says dogmatically: ‘he who has the Son has life’ (1 Jn. 5:12). Indeed, the whole Bible may fairly be described as a divine promise of life, from the first mention of ‘the tree of life’ in Genesis 3 to the last chapter of the Revelation in which God’s redeemed people eat of the tree of life and drink of the water of life freely. Eternal life is a gift ‘which God, who never lies, promised ages ago’, but has now made known through the preaching of the gospel (cf. verses 9, 10; Tit. 1:2, 3; Rom. 1:1, 2).

This, then, is how Paul introduces himself. He is an apostle of Christ Jesus. His apostleship originated in the will of God and has issued in the proclamation of the gospel of God, namely ‘the promise of the life which is in Christ Jesus’.

2. Timothy, Paul’s Beloved Child (verses 2–8)

Paul calls Timothy here ‘my beloved child’ and elsewhere ‘my beloved and faithful child in the Lord’ (1 Cor. 4:17) presumably because he had been the human instrument of Timothy’s conversion. Certainly the reason he could describe the Corinthians as ‘my beloved children’ was ‘for I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel’ (1 Cor. 4:14, 15). We assume, therefore, that when Paul visited Lystra on the first missionary journey ‘and there ... preached the gospel’ (Acts 14:6, 7), Timothy both heard and embraced the good news, so that, when Paul re-visited Lystra a few years later on his second missionary journey ‘a disciple was there, named Timothy’, who had already made such progress in the Christian life that ‘he was well spoken of by the brethren at Lystra and Iconium’ (Acts 16:1, 2).

To his ‘beloved child’ Paul now sends his usual greeting of ‘grace ... and peace’, though adding in both letters to

Timothy 'mercy' as well. We may be sure that this threefold greeting is no mere epistolary convention. For these are pregnant theological words. They tell us much both about man's sorry condition in sin and about God's great love for him all the same. For if grace is God's kindness to the undeserving, mercy is shown to the weak and helpless who cannot help themselves. In the parables of Jesus it was mercy which the good Samaritan showed to the brigands' victim and which the king extended to his servant who was so deeply in debt that he could not pay (Lk. 10:37; Mt. 18:33). And it was mercy which had converted Saul of Tarsus, the old blasphemer and persecutor. 'I received mercy', he had written in his earlier letter to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:13, 16). 'Peace', on the other hand, is reconciliation, the restoration of harmony to lives spoiled by discord. We may perhaps summarize these three blessings of God's love as being grace to the worthless, mercy to the helpless and peace to the restless, while 'God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord' together constitute the one spring from which this threefold stream flows forth.

There follows a very personal paragraph, in which the apostle assures Timothy that he constantly remembers him. 'I remember you constantly in my prayers,' he says (3). 'I remember your tears' (4). 'I am reminded of your sincere faith' (5). And whenever I remember you, Timothy, 'I thank God' (3).

This last point is significant, it indicates Paul's recognition that it was God who had made Timothy what he was. Timothy was not an apostle like Paul. They used to make this plain when they wrote letters to the churches together, e.g. to the Colossians: 'Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother ...'. Timothy was a Christian brother. He was also a Christian minister, a missionary, and an apostolic delegate. And God had been at work in his life to make him all these things. Directly or indirectly in this paragraph Paul mentions the four major influences which had contributed to the shaping and making of Timothy.

a. His parental upbringing

Paul refers in this paragraph both to his own and to Timothy's ancestry, to his 'forefathers' (3, literally) and to Timothy's mother and grandmother (5). This was right, for every man is to a great extent the product of his inheritance. The most formative influence on each of us has been our parentage and our home. Hence good biographies never begin with their subject, but with his parents, and probably his grandparents as well. True, no man can inherit his parents' faith in the way that he inherits facets of their personality. But a child can be led to faith by his parents' teaching, example and prayers.

Now Timothy had had a godly home. Luke tells us that he was the son of a mixed marriage, in that his father was Greek and his mother Jewish (Acts 16:1). Presumably his father was an unbeliever, but his mother Eunice was a believing Jewess who became a Christian. And before her his grandmother Lois had evidently been converted, for Paul can write of the 'sincere faith' of all three generations (5). Perhaps grandmother, mother and son all owed their conversion to Paul when he brought the gospel to Lystra. Even before their conversion to Christ, however, these godly Jewish women had instructed Timothy out of the Old Testament, so that 'from childhood' he had been 'acquainted with the sacred writings' (3:15). Calvin's rather delightful comment is that Timothy 'was reared in his infancy in such a way that he could suck in godliness along with his mother's milk'.^[1]

Paul could say much the same of himself. He was serving God 'with a clear conscience', as his forefathers had done before him (3). Of course his faith became richer, fuller and deeper when God had revealed Christ to him. Yet it was still substantially the same faith as that of Old Testament believers like Abraham and David, as he had argued in Romans 4, for it was the same God in whom they had all believed. No wonder he had been able to affirm to Felix the procurator: 'I worship the God of my fathers' (Acts 24:14; cf. 26:6). We need to remember this when we are witnessing to Jewish people today. A Jew's conversion to Christ is not in any sense an act of disloyalty to his forefathers; it is rather the fulfilment of his forefathers' faith and hope.

Returning to Timothy, the first influence on him was his parental upbringing, and in particular a mother and a grandmother who were sincere believers and who had taught him out of the Scriptures from his childhood. Today also anyone who has been born and bred in a Christian home has received from God a blessing beyond price.

b. His spiritual friendship

After our parents it is our friends who influence us most, especially if they are also in some sense our teachers. And Timothy had in Paul an outstanding teacher-friend.

We have already seen that Paul was Timothy's spiritual 'father'. Having led him to Christ, however, he did not abandon or even forget him. No. He constantly 'remembered' him, as he says repeatedly in this passage. He had also taken him with him on his journeys and trained him as his apprentice. When they had parted on the last occasion, Timothy had been unable to hold back his tears. And now, remembering his tears, Paul longed 'night and day' to see him again, that he might again be 'filled with joy' (4), longed (Bishop Handley Moule renders *epipothōn*) with 'homesick yearning'^[2] Meanwhile, he was praying for him without ceasing (3), and from time to time wrote him letters of counsel and encouragement, like this one.

Such a Christian friendship, including the companionship, the letters and the prayers through which it was expressed, did not fail to have a powerful moulding effect on young Timothy, strengthening and sustaining him in his Christian life and service.

I thank God for the man who led me to Christ and for the extraordinary devotion with which he nurtured me in the early years of my Christian life. He wrote to me every week for, I think, seven years. He also prayed for me every day. I believe he still does. I can only begin to guess what I owe, under God, to such a faithful friend and pastor.

c. His special endowment

Paul turns now from the indirect means God used to shape Timothy's Christian character (his parents and friends) to a

direct gift which God had given him. 'Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands' (6). What this gift of God's grace was, this *charisma*, we do not know with any certainty, for the very good reason that we are not told. We have no liberty to go beyond Scripture. Nevertheless, we can hazard a guess, so long as we recognize its tentative nature. What is clear, both from this verse and from a similar reference in 1 Timothy 4:14, is that the gift was bestowed upon him when Paul and certain 'elders' (probably of the Lystra church) laid their hands on him. Both verses mention the laying-on of hands and seem to refer to what we might call his 'ordination' or 'commissioning'. If we are right so far, then the gift in question was an 'ordination gift', a gift related to his ministry. Paul may indeed be referring to the ministry itself, to which by the laying-on of hands Timothy was set apart. Certainly the offices of pastor and teacher, like those of apostle and prophet, are designated gifts of God's grace (Eph. 4:7, 11). So Dean Alford may be right to say that 'the spiritual gift is that of teaching and ruling the church'.³ Or the reference may be to the gift of an evangelist, which work Paul will soon urge Timothy to do and so fulfil his ministry (4:5). Or again, since the apostle proceeds at once to refer to the kind of spirit God has given us (7), he may be alluding to a special endowment or anointing of the Spirit which Timothy received at his ordination to equip him for the work to which he had been called. Speaking for myself, I think it is safest to describe Timothy's *charisma* in Alfred Plummer's words as 'the authority and power to be a minister of Christ'.⁴ That is, it included both the office and the spiritual equipment needed to fulfil it.

We learn, then, that a man is not only what he owes to his parents, friends and teachers, but what God himself has made him by calling him to some particular ministry and by endowing him with appropriate spiritual resources.

d. His personal discipline

Indeed, all God's gifts—natural and spiritual—need to be developed and used. Our Lord's parables of the talents and the pounds illustrate clearly the duty of service, the reward of faithfulness and the danger of sloth. So Paul tells Timothy in his first letter not to 'neglect' his gift (4:14) and in his second letter rather to 'kindle' or 'rekindle' it (6). The gift is likened to a fire. The Greek verb *anazōpureō*, which occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, does not necessarily imply that Timothy has let the fire die down and must now fan the dying embers into flame again. The prefix *ana* can indicate as much a stirring up as a re-kindling. It seems, then, that Paul's exhortation is to continue fanning it, to 'stir up that inner fire' (JBP), to keep it alive, even ablaze, presumably by exercising the gift faithfully and by waiting upon God in prayer for its constant renewal.

Having issued this appeal, Paul immediately adds his reason: 'for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control' (7). We have already considered the problems of youth, ill health and temperament with which timid Timothy had to battle. He appears to have been a very shy and sensitive creature, to whom responsibility was an onerous burden. Perhaps he was also fearful of spiritual excesses and extravagances. So Paul is obliged not only to urge him to keep stirring up his gift, but to reassure him that he need not be diffident about exercising it.

Why not? Well, because 'cowardliness has nothing to do with Christianity'.⁵ Or, as Paul expresses it, because of the Spirit God has given us. Notice that, though a particular spiritual gift was given to 'you', Timothy, the gift of the Spirit himself has been given to *us*, to all of us who are in Christ. And this Spirit God has given to us all is a Spirit not of 'timidity' but of 'power and love and self-control'. Since he is the Spirit of power we may be confident of his enabling as we exercise our ministry. Since he is the Spirit of love we must use God's authority and power in serving others, not in self-assertion or vainglory. And since he is the Spirit of self-control we must use them with seemly reverence and restraint.

So far we have studied what the first seven verses of the letter tell us about these two men, Paul and Timothy, and their making. Paul claims to be Jesus Christ's apostle 'by the will of God', as previously he had said it was 'by the grace of God' that he was what he was (1 Cor. 15:10). And a whole complex of factors had made Timothy what he was—a godly upbringing, Paul's friendship and training, God's gift to him and his own self-discipline in stirring it up.

In principle, it is the same with all God's people. Perhaps the most striking thing is the combination in both Paul and Timothy of divine sovereignty and human responsibility, those two facts of revelation and of experience which we find it difficult to reconcile and impossible to systematize into a tidy doctrine.

Paul could write of God's will and assert that God's grace had made him what he was. But then he would at once add: 'and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me' (1 Cor. 15:10). That is, he added his labour to God's grace, although, to be sure, it was God's grace which inspired his labour.

Timothy was similar. His mother and grandmother could teach him out of the Scriptures and lead him towards conversion. Paul could actually bring him to Christ, befriend him, pray for him, write to him, train and exhort him. And God could give him a special gift at his ordination. But still Timothy must himself stir up the divine gift within him. He must add his own self-discipline to God's gifts.

We are no different. However much (or little) we may have received from God, either directly in natural and spiritual endowment or indirectly through parents, friends and teachers, we must still apply ourselves in active self-discipline to cooperate with God's grace, to keep fanning the inner fire into flame. Otherwise, we shall never be the men and women God wants us to be, or fulfil the ministry he has given us to exercise.

Paul now turns from the varied factors which had contributed to the making of Timothy to the truth of the gospel and to Timothy's responsibility in relation to the gospel. Before he defines the gospel, he begs Timothy not to be ashamed of it (8). Suffering rather than shame is to characterize Timothy's ministry. He may be young, frail, timid and weak. He may shrink from the tasks to which he is being called. But God has moulded and gifted him for his ministry. So he must not be

ashamed or afraid to exercise it.

This means, to begin with, that Timothy must 'not be ashamed' of Christ, 'of testifying to our Lord'. Every Christian is Christ's witness, and Christian testimony is essentially testimony to or about Christ (*cf.* Jn. 15:26, 27; Acts 1:8). So every Christian must be ready and willing, if necessary, to be a 'fool for Christ's sake' (1 Cor. 4:10); he need not be prepared to be a fool for anyone else's!

If Timothy must not be ashamed of the Lord, he must not be ashamed of Paul either. For it is possible to be proud of Christ, but ashamed of his people and embarrassed to be associated with them. It seems that when Paul was re-arrested and put in chains, nearly all his former supporters forsook him (15). He now begs Timothy not to follow suit. He may be the emperor's prisoner in the eyes of men; he is the Lord's prisoner in reality, his willing captive, and held in prison by man only by Christ's permission and for Christ's sake.^[6]

Timothy must also not be ashamed of the gospel, but rather take his share of suffering for it. Weak as he was in himself, he could be fortified by the power of God to endure it. For endure suffering he must, since the gospel of Christ crucified, folly to some and a stumbling-block to others (1 Cor. 1:23), always arouses opposition. And opposing the message, men naturally oppose its messengers, who thus 'suffer with the suffering gospel'.^[7]

These are still the three main ways in which Christian people, like Timothy, are tempted to feel ashamed: now of the *name* of Christ, to whom we are called to witness, now of the *people* of Christ, to whom we also belong if we belong to him, and now of the *gospel* of Christ, which is entrusted to us to spread.

The temptation is strong and insidious. If Timothy had not felt it, Paul would not have exhorted him in these terms. If Paul himself had never felt it, it would have been unnecessary for him some years previously to assert with such vehemence, 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith' (Rom. 1:16). Indeed, if this were not a temptation common to man, the Lord Jesus would not have needed to issue the solemn warning, 'For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels' (Mk. 8:38). We are all more sensitive to public opinion than we like to admit, and tend to bow down too readily before its pressure, like reeds shaken by the wind.

Paul now enlarges on the gospel of which Timothy is not to be ashamed, and for which he must take his share of suffering. He begins by sketching its main features (9, 10) and then summarizes our responsibility in relation to it (11–18). This then is the double theme of the rest of the chapter: God's gospel and our duty.

3. God's Gospel (verses 9, 10)

It is striking to hear Paul pass at once from a reference to 'the gospel' to the central affirmation 'God ... saved us'. For it is really impossible to speak of the gospel without going on in the same breath to speak of salvation. The gospel is precisely this, good news of salvation, or good news 'of our Saviour Christ Jesus' (10). Ever since the glad tidings of great joy were first announced on Christmas Day in terms of the birth of 'a Saviour who is Christ the Lord' (Lk. 2:10, 11), the followers of Jesus have recognized its essential content. Paul himself never wavered. In Pisidian Antioch during the first missionary journey he referred to his gospel as 'the message of this salvation'. In Philippi during the second missionary journey he and his companions were described as 'servants of the Most High God, who proclaimed to you the way of salvation'. And writing to the Ephesians from Rome he called the word of truth 'the gospel of your salvation' (Acts 13:26; 16:17; Eph. 1:13).

So here, as Paul writes about the gospel, the terminology which he has made familiar recurs, namely that we are saved in Christ Jesus by God's purpose, grace and call, and not by our own works. For he is expounding the same gospel in his last letter (2 Timothy) as he expounded in his first (Galatians). His gospel has not changed with the passing years. There is only one gospel of salvation. And although both words 'gospel' and 'salvation' need today to be translated into terms meaningful to modern man, we have no liberty to alter the substance of our message. As we come to look more closely at the concise statement of God's gospel which he makes in these verses, we shall see that he indicates its character (what it is), its source (where it comes from) and its ground (on what it rests).

a. The character of salvation

We need to bring together the three clauses which assert that he 'saved us', he 'called us with a holy calling' and he 'brought life and immortality to light'. For these make it plain that salvation is far more than forgiveness. The God who 'saved' us also and simultaneously 'called us with a holy calling', *i.e.* 'called us to be holy' (JB). The Christian calling is a holy calling. When God calls a man to himself, he calls him to holiness also. Paul has laid much emphasis on this in his earlier letters. 'God has not called us for uncleanness, but in holiness.' For all of us are 'called to be saints', called to live as the holy, the separated people of God (1 Thes. 4:7; 1 Cor. 1:2). But if holiness is an integral part of God's plan of salvation, so is the 'immortality' of which he writes in the following verse (10). Indeed, 'forgiveness', 'holiness' and 'immortality' are all three aspects of God's great 'salvation'.

The term 'salvation' urgently needs to be rescued from the mean and meagre concepts to which we tend to degrade it. 'Salvation' is a majestic word, denoting that comprehensive purpose of God by which he justifies, sanctifies and glorifies his people: first, pardoning our offences and accepting us as righteous in his sight through Christ, then progressively transforming us by his Spirit into the image of his Son, until finally we become like Christ in heaven, with new bodies in a new world. We must not minimize the greatness of 'such a great salvation' (Heb. 2:3).

b. The source of salvation

Where does such a great salvation come from? Paul answers, 'not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ ages ago' (9). If we would trace the river of salvation to its source, we must look right back beyond time to a past eternity. The apostle's actual words are 'before eternal times',^[8] an expression variously rendered 'before the world began' (AV), 'before time began' (JBP) and 'from all eternity' (NEB).

In order to put beyond question the truth that God's predestination and election belong to eternity and not to time, Paul uses an aorist participle to indicate that God actually gave us something (*dotheisan*) from all eternity in Christ. What he gave us was 'his own purpose and grace', a hendiadys for 'his own purpose of grace'. His saving purpose was not arbitrary, but gracious.^[9] It is plain, therefore, that the source of our salvation is not our own works. For God gave us his own purpose of grace in Christ before we did any good works, before we were born and could do any good works, indeed before history, before time, in eternity.

We have to confess that the doctrine of election is difficult to finite minds. But it is incontrovertibly a biblical doctrine. It emphasizes that salvation is due to God's grace alone, not to man's merit; not to our works performed in time, but to God's purpose conceived in eternity, 'that purpose', as Bishop Ellicott expressed it, 'which was suggested by nothing outward, but arose only from the innermost depths of the divine *eudokia*'.^[10] Or, in E. K. Simpson's words, 'the Lord's choices have their unfathomable grounds, but they are not founded on the innate eligibility of the chosen'.^[11] Thus understood, God's purpose of election is bound to be mysterious to men, for we cannot aspire to an understanding of the secret thoughts and decisions of the mind of God. However, the doctrine of election is never introduced in Scripture either to arouse or to baffle our carnal curiosity, but always for a practical purpose. On the one hand, it engenders deep humility and gratitude, for it excludes all boasting. On the other, it brings both peace and assurance, for nothing can quieten our fears for our own stability like the knowledge that our safety depends ultimately not on ourselves but on God's own purpose of grace.

c. The ground of salvation

Our salvation rests firmly grounded upon the historical work performed by Jesus Christ at his first appearing. For though God 'gave' us his grace in Christ Jesus 'before eternal times', he 'manifested' it in time, 'now', through the appearing of the same Christ Jesus, our Saviour. Both divine stages were in and through Jesus Christ, but the giving was eternal and secret, while the manifesting was historical and public.

What, then, did Christ do when he appeared and proceeded to manifest God's eternal purpose of grace? To this Paul gives in verse 10 a double answer. First, Jesus Christ 'abolished death'. Secondly, he 'brought life and immortality to light through the gospel'.

First, Christ abolished death.

'Death' is, in fact, the one word which summarizes our human predicament as a result of sin. For death is the 'wage' sin pays, its grim penalty (Rom. 6:23). And this is true of each form which death takes. For Scripture speaks of death in three ways. There is physical death, the separation of the soul from the body. There is spiritual death, the separation of the soul from God. And there is eternal death, the separation of both soul and body from God for ever. All are due to sin; they are sin's terrible though just reward.

But Jesus Christ 'abolished' death. This cannot mean that he eliminated it, as we know from our everyday experience. Sinners are still 'dead through the trespasses and sins' in which they walk (Eph. 2:1, 2) until God makes them alive in Christ. All human beings die physically and will continue to do so, with the exception of the generation who are alive when Christ returns in glory. And some are going to die 'the second death', which is one of the fearful expressions used in the book of Revelation for hell (*e.g.* Rev. 20:14; 21:8). Indeed, Paul has written previously that the final abolition of death still lies in the future, as the last enemy of God to be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26). Not until the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead shall we be able to shout with joy 'Death is swallowed up in victory' (1 Cor. 15:54; *cf.* Rev. 21:4).

What is triumphantly asserted in this verse by Paul is that at his first appearing Christ decisively 'defeated' or 'overthrew' death. The Greek verb *katargeō* is not in itself conclusive, for it can be used with a variety of meanings, which must be determined by the context. Nevertheless, its first and foremost meaning is "make ineffective, powerless, idle" or 'nullify' (AG). So Paul can liken death to a scorpion whose sting has been drawn and to a military commander whose army has been defeated, and can cry out with defiance: 'O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?' (1 Cor. 15:55). For Christ 'has broken the power of death' (AG, NEB).

It is surely significant that this same verb *katargeō* is used in the New Testament with reference to the devil and to our fallen nature as well as to death (Heb. 2:14; Rom. 6:6). Neither the devil, nor our fallen nature, nor death has been annihilated. But by the power of Christ the tyranny of each has been broken, so that if we are in Christ we can be set free.

Consider in particular how Christ has 'abolished' or 'nullified' death.

Physical death is no longer the grim ogre it once seemed to us and still seems to many whom Christ has not yet liberated. "Through fear of death" they are 'subject to lifelong bondage' (Heb. 2:15). But for Christian believers death is simply 'falling asleep' in Christ. It is, in fact, a positive 'gain', because it is the gateway to being 'with Christ' which is 'far better'. It is one of the possessions which become 'ours' when we are Christ's (1 Thes. 4:14, 15; Phil. 1:21, 23; 1 Cor. 3:22, 23). It has been rendered so innocuous that Jesus could even state that the believer, though he dies, 'shall never die' (Jn. 11:25, 26). What is absolutely certain is that death will never be able to separate us from God's love in Christ (Rom. 8:38, 39).

Spiritual death has, for Christian believers, given place to that eternal life which is communion with God begun on earth and perfected in heaven. Further, those who are in Christ will 'not be hurt by the second death', for they have already

passed out of death into life (Rev. 2:11; Jn. 5:24; 1 Jn. 3:14).

Secondly, Christ brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

This is the positive counterpart. It is by his death and resurrection that Christ abolished death. It is through the gospel that he now reveals what he has done, and offers men the life and immortality which he has won for them. Whether we should distinguish between the words 'life' and 'immortality' is not clear. They may be synonymous, the second word defining the first. That is, the kind of life Christ has secured for us, and now discloses and offers through the gospel is eternal life, a life that is immortal and incorruptible. Only God possesses immortality in himself. But Christ gives it to men. Even our bodies after the resurrection will share in this immortality (1 Cor. 15:42, 52–54). So will the inheritance which we shall receive (1 Pet. 1:4). On the other hand, as C. K. Barrett writes: 'possibly "life" refers to the new life made available in this world, "immortality" to its prolongation after death'.^[12] Whichever way we take the words, both are 'revealed' or 'brought to light' through the gospel. There are many hints in Old Testament Scripture about a life after death, and a few bright flashes of faith, but on the whole the Old Testament revelation was what Bishop Moule called a 'comparative dusk'.^[13] Now, however, the gospel has thrown floods of light upon the offer of immortal life through Christ's conquest of death.

In order to appreciate the full force of this Christian affirmation, we need to call to mind who it is who is making it. Who is this who writes so confidently about life and death, about the abolition of death and the revelation of life? It is one who is facing the prospect of imminent death himself. Any day now he expects to receive the death sentence. Already the final summons is ringing in his ears. Already he can see in his imagination the flash of the executioner's sword. And yet, in the very presence of death, he can shout aloud: 'Christ has abolished death'. This is Christian faith triumphant!

How one longs for the contemporary church to recover its lost certainty about the victory of Jesus Christ and to declare this good news to a world for whom death is the great unmentionable. *The Observer* magazine devoted a whole issue to death in October 1968 and commented: 'Far from being prepared for death, modern society has made the very word almost unmentionable... we have brought all our talents into use to avoid the prospect of dying—and when the time comes we may react with anything from excessive triviality to total despair.'

One of the most searching tests to apply to any religion concerns its attitude to death. And measured by this test much so-called Christianity is found wanting with its black clothes, its mournful chants and its requiem masses. Of course dying can be very unpleasant, and bereavement can bring bitter sorrow. But death itself has been overthrown, and 'blessed are the dead who die in the Lord' (Rev. 14:13). The proper epitaph to write for a Christian believer is not a dismal and uncertain petition, 'R.I.P.' (*requiescat in pace*, 'may he rest in peace'), but a joyful and certain affirmation 'C.A.D.' ('Christ abolished death') or—if you prefer the classical languages—its Greek or Latin equivalent!

Such, then, is the salvation which is offered us in the gospel and which is ours in Christ. Its *character* is man's re-creation and transformation into the holiness of Christ here and hereafter. Its *source* is God's eternal purpose of grace. Its *ground* is Christ's historical appearing and abolition of death.

Putting these great truths together, we seem to detect five stages by which God's saving purpose unfolds. The first is the eternal gift to us in Christ of his grace. The second is the historical appearing of Christ to abolish death by his death and resurrection. The third is the personal call of God to sinners through the preaching of the gospel. The fourth is the moral sanctification of believers by the Holy Spirit. And the fifth is the final heavenly perfection in which the holy calling is consummated.

The sweep of God's purpose of grace is majestic indeed, as Paul traces it from a past eternity through a historical outworking in Jesus Christ and in the Christian to an ultimate destiny with Christ and like Christ in a future immortality. Is it not truly wonderful that, although Paul's body is confined within the narrow limits of an underground cell, his heart and mind can thus soar into eternity?

4. Our Duty in Relation to God's Gospel (verses 11–18)

If we were to ask Paul what man's first duty is in relation to the gospel, he would of course say to receive it and live by it. But his concern here is not with the unbeliever's duty, but with the duty of a Christian towards the gospel after he has himself embraced it. In answer to this question Paul gives three answers.

a. Our duty to communicate the gospel (verse 11)

If the 'life and immortality' which Christ achieved are 'brought... to light through the gospel', then of course it is imperative that we should proclaim the gospel. So Paul continues: 'For this gospel I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher.' The same combination of words occurs in 1 Timothy 2:7, and in both Paul uses the emphatic *egō*, no doubt to express his 'sense of personal wonder'.^[14] that he should have been given this privilege.

Perhaps we can relate the three offices of 'apostle', 'preacher' and 'teacher' by saying that the apostles formulated the gospel, preachers proclaim it like heralds, and teachers instruct people systematically in its doctrines and in its ethical implications.

There are no apostles of Christ today. We have already seen how restricted is the New Testament use of this term. The gospel was formulated by the apostles and has now been bequeathed by them to the church. It is found in its definitive form in the New Testament. This apostolic New Testament faith is regulative for the church of every age and place. The church is 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets' (Eph. 2:20). There is no other gospel. There can be no new gospel.

Although there are no apostles of Christ today, there are certainly preachers and teachers, men and women called by

God to devote themselves to the work of preaching and teaching. Notice that what they are called both to preach and to teach is the gospel. It is fashionable in theological circles to distinguish sharply between the *kērygma* (what was preached) and the *didachē* (what was taught), the *kērygma* being essentially the good news of Christ crucified and risen, with the summons to repent and believe, the *didachē* being largely ethical instruction to converts. The distinction is useful, but can be overpressed. It is safe only if we remember how much they overlapped. There was a lot of *didachē* in the *kērygma* and a lot of *kērygma* in the *didachē*. And, moreover, both concerned the gospel, for the *kērygma* was the proclamation of its essence, while the *didachē* included the great doctrines which undergird it as well as the moral behaviour which follows from it.

The reference to ‘witness’ in verse 8, which we have already considered, adds a fourth word to this list. It reminds us that, although there are no apostles today, and although only some are called to the ministry of preaching and teaching, every Christian believer is to be a witness and to testify to Jesus Christ out of his own personal experience.

b. Our duty to suffer for the gospel (verse 12a)

Paul has already summoned Timothy not to be ashamed but to take his share of suffering for the gospel (8), and he will enlarge on this theme in the second chapter of his letter. But now he emphasizes that he is not asking from Timothy something he is not prepared to experience himself: ‘... and therefore I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed ...’ What is the reason for this link between suffering and the gospel? What is there about the gospel which men hate and oppose, and on account of which those who preach it have to suffer?

Just this: God saves sinners in virtue of his own purpose and grace, and not in virtue of their good works (9). It is the undeserved freeness of the gospel which offends. The ‘natural’ or unregenerate man hates to have to admit the gravity of his sin and guilt, his complete helplessness to save himself, the indispensable necessity of God’s grace and Christ’s sinbearing death to save him, and therefore his inescapable indebtedness to the cross. This is what Paul meant by ‘the stumbling block of the cross’. Many preachers succumb to the temptation to mute it. They preach man and his merit instead of Christ and his cross, and they substitute the one for the other ‘in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ’ (Gal. 6:12; cf. 5:11). No man can preach Christ crucified with faithfulness and escape opposition, even persecution.

c. Our duty to guard the gospel (verses 12b–18)

Leaving aside for the moment the second part of verse 12, we come to Paul’s double exhortation to Timothy in the next two verses: ‘Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me’ (13); ‘Guard the truth that has been entrusted to you’ (14). Here Paul refers to the gospel, the apostolic faith, by two expressions. It is both a pattern of sound words (13) and a precious deposit (14).

‘Sound’ words are ‘healthy’ words, the Greek expression being used in the Gospels of people whom Jesus healed. Previously they had been maimed or diseased; now they were well or ‘whole’. So the Christian faith is ‘the sound teaching’ (4:3), consisting of ‘sound words’, because it is not maimed or diseased but ‘whole’. It is what Paul had previously called ‘the whole counsel of God’ (Acts 20:27).

Further, these ‘sound words’ had been given by Paul to Timothy in a ‘pattern’. Here the Greek word is *hypotypōsis*. NEB translates it ‘outline’, and Dr. Guthrie says it ‘means an outline sketch such as an architect might make before getting down to the detailed plans of a building’.¹⁵ In this case Paul is implying that Timothy must amplify, expound and apply the apostle’s teaching. The context, especially the parallel with the next verse, seems to me to make this an unlikely explanation. The only other occurrence of *hypotypōsis* in the New Testament is in Paul’s first letter to Timothy where he describes himself, the object of Christ’s amazing mercy and perfect patience, as ‘an *example* to those who were to believe in him’ (1:16). Arndt and Gingrich, who give ‘model’ or ‘example’ as the usual translation, suggest that it is used ‘rather in the sense *prototype*’ in 1 Timothy 1:16 and ‘rather in the sense *standard*’ in 2 Timothy 1:13. In this case Paul is commanding Timothy to keep before him as his standard of sound words, or ‘as a model of sound teaching’ (NEB mg.) what he had heard from the apostle. This certainly suits the general teaching of the letter and faithfully reflects the emphasis of the sentence on the first word ‘model’ or ‘standard’.

So Paul’s teaching is to be Timothy’s guide or rule. He is not to depart from it. He is to follow it, better to hold it fast (*eche*). And he must do so ‘in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus’. That is, Paul is concerned not just with *what* Timothy is to do, but with *how* he does it. His personal doctrinal convictions and his instruction of others, as he grips hold of Paul’s teaching, are to be characterized by faith and love. He is to seek these qualities from Christ, a sincere belief and a tender charity.

The apostolic faith is not only ‘a standard of sound words’; it is also ‘the good deposit’ (*hē kalē parathēkē*). These are the words which the AV renders ‘that good thing which was committed unto thee’, the RSV ‘the truth that has been entrusted to you’, and the NEB ‘the treasure put into your charge’. For the gospel is a treasure—a good, noble and precious treasure—deposited for safe keeping with the church. Christ had entrusted it to Paul, and Paul now entrusts it to Timothy.

Timothy is to ‘guard’ it. Paul has addressed precisely the same appeal to him at the end of his first letter (6:20), except that now he calls it the ‘good’, literally the ‘beautiful’, deposit. The verb (*phyllassō*) means to guard something ‘so that it is not lost or damaged’ (AG). It is used of guarding a palace against marauders and possessions against thieves (Lk. 11:21; Acts 22:20). There were heretics abroad, bent on corrupting the gospel and so robbing the church of the priceless treasure which had been entrusted to it. Timothy must be on the watch.

And he must guard the gospel all the more tenaciously because of what had happened in and around Ephesus (the capital of the Roman province of Asia) where Timothy was (15). The aorist tense of the verb ‘turned away from me’ seems to refer to some particular event. The most likely allusion is to the moment of the apostle’s re-arrest. The churches

of Asia, where he had laboured for several years, had depended heavily upon him. Perhaps his arrest seemed to them to indicate that the Christian cause was now lost. Perhaps they reacted by repudiating and disowning him. We know nothing of Phygelus and Hermogenes, but their mention suggests they were the ringleaders. In any case Paul saw the turning away of the Asian churches as more than a personal desertion; it was a disavowal of his apostolic authority. It must have seemed particularly tragic, because a few years previously, during Paul's two and a half years' residence in Ephesus, Luke says that 'all the residents of Asia' heard the word of the Lord and many believed (Acts 19:10). Now 'all in Asia' had turned away from him. The great awakening had been followed by a great defection. 'To every eye but that of faith it must have appeared just then as if the gospel were on the eve of extinction.'¹⁶

The one bright exception appears to have been a man called Onesiphorus, who had often entertained Paul in his home (literally 'refreshed' him, verse 16), and had rendered him other, unspecified service in Ephesus (18). He had thus been true to the meaning of his name, 'a bringer of profit'. In addition, he had not been ashamed of Paul's chains (16), which seems to mean both that he did not repudiate him at the time of his arrest and that he then followed him, even accompanied him, to Rome, and then searched diligently for him until he found him in his dungeon. Paul had good reason to be grateful for this faithful and courageous friend. It is not surprising, therefore, that he twice utters a prayer (16, 18), first for his household ('may the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus') and then for Onesiphorus himself ('may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day').

Various commentators, especially Roman Catholics, have argued from the references to the household of Onesiphorus (mentioned again in 4:19) and to 'that Day' that Onesiphorus himself was now dead, and that we have therefore in verse 18 a petition for the departed. This is an entirely gratuitous assumption, however. The fact that Paul keeps distinct his allusions to Onesiphorus on the one hand and to his household on the other could equally well mean that they were separated from each other by distance as by death, Onesiphorus being still in Rome, while his family were at home in Ephesus. 'I take it to be a prayer for them separately, the man and his family,' writes Bishop Handley Moule, 'because they were for the time separated from one another by lands and seas ... There is no need at all to assume that Onesiphorus had died. Separation from his family by a journey quite satisfies the language of the passage.'¹⁷

At all events, everybody in Asia, as Timothy was keenly aware, had turned away from the apostle, with the exception of loyal Onesiphorus and his family. It was in such a situation of almost universal apostasy that Timothy was to 'guard the good deposit', to 'hold firm the standard of sound words', that is to say, to preserve the gospel unsullied and unalloyed. It would have been a heavy responsibility for any man, let alone a man of Timothy's temperament. How then could he stand firm?

The apostle gives Timothy the reassurance he needs. He cannot hope to guard the gospel-treasure by himself; he can do it only 'by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us' (14b). The same truth is taught in the second part of verse 12, which so far we have not considered. Most Christians are familiar with the AV rendering 'for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day'. These words are true, for many biblical passages confirm them, and linguistically speaking, they are accurately translated. But the context makes another interpretation more probable. The AV words 'that which I have committed unto him' are a rendering of 'my deposit' (*tēn parathēkēn mou*). Indeed, both the verb ('guard') and the noun ('deposit') are precisely the same in verse 12 as in verse 14 and in 1 Timothy 6:20. The presumption is therefore that 'my deposit' is not what I have committed to him (my soul or myself, as in 1 Pet. 4:19) but what he has committed to me (the gospel).

The sense, then, is this. The deposit is 'mine', Paul could say, because Christ had committed it to him. Yet Paul was persuaded that Christ would himself keep it safe 'until that Day' when he would have to give an account of his stewardship. What was the ground of his confidence? Just this: 'I know him.' Paul knew Christ in whom he had put his trust and was convinced of his ability to keep the deposit safe: 'I know whom I have believed, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me' (12). He has entrusted it to me, it is true; but he will take care of it himself. And now that Paul is entrusting it to Timothy, Timothy can be sustained by the same assurance.

There is great encouragement here. Ultimately, it is God himself who is the guarantor of the gospel. It is his responsibility to preserve it. 'On no other ground would the work of preaching be for a moment endurable.'¹⁸ We may see the evangelical faith, the faith of the gospel, everywhere spoken against, and the apostolic message of the New Testament ridiculed. We may have to watch an increasing apostasy in the church, as our generation abandons the faith of its fathers. Do not be afraid! God will never allow the light of the gospel to be finally extinguished. True, he has committed it to us, frail and fallible creatures. He has placed his treasure in brittle, earthenware vessels. And we must play our part in guarding and defending the truth. Nevertheless, in entrusting the deposit to our hands, he has not taken his own hands off it. He is himself its final guardian, and *he* will preserve the truth which he has committed to the church. We know this because we know him in whom we have trusted and continue to trust.

We have seen that the gospel is good news of salvation, promised from eternity, secured by Christ in time, offered to faith.

Our first duty is to *communicate* this gospel, to use old ways and seek fresh ways of making it known throughout the whole world.

If we do so, we shall undoubtedly *suffer* for it, for the authentic gospel has never been popular. It humbles the sinner too much.

And when we are called to suffer for the gospel, we are tempted to trim it, to eliminate those elements which give offence and cause opposition, to mute the notes which jar on sensitive modern ears.

But we must resist the temptation. For, above all, we are called to *guard* the gospel, keeping it pure whatever the cost, and preserving it against every corruption.

Guard it faithfully. Spread it actively. Suffer for it bravely. This is our threefold duty vis-à-vis the gospel of God as expounded in this first chapter.