

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL STUDY IN THE SECOND BOOK OF TIMOTHY – PART TWO – NOTES ON CHAPTER ONE AND QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER TWO

Paul starts his last letter to Timothy as he so often does, mostly strongly at the beginning of Galatians, by emphasising that his task as a special messenger was a calling from God not any human institution. There were many who gave him advice and support but the Lord was his boss to whom alone he looked for wisdom and resources. He had a strong influence in determining the direction of Timothy's life but he wanted Timothy to know that to his Father in heaven he should now look even more as Paul's days were limited. We can trust God to be our boss, because He has promised us the life of Christ in us to make His plan for us work. That promise can be summed up by three often repeated words. Grace describes all that our loving Father gives us, His totally sufficient provision for every situation. Mercy is where grace starts. Mercy means that we are forgiven not punished for our former independence of Him. Peace is that marvellous calm within which allows us to hear all God is saying and be confident that He will take care of the consequences of our enthusiastic obedience.(1:1,2)

In nearly all of his letters Paul follows his greeting with prayer. All of his prayers began not as we might expect with a string of requests but with thanksgiving. He always started with the recognition of how rich the grace of God had made him after which he would explain how he believed those spiritual riches could be drawn on for those to whom he wrote. His clear conscience was the peace he had spoken of in verse one. Paul's description of his night and day prayers for Timothy did not mean that he walked around with his hands together and his eyes closed, talking under his breath to God. It simply described how with the peace of God he could be constantly listening to God.(I Thess.5:17,18) Being switched on to God would be the secret of the content of each letter he wrote. Otherwise how would he know what to write? His prayer for Timothy kept his love for him fresh and focused.(1:3,4)

As Paul thinks of Timothy he cannot help remembering the family from which he came. Timothy's mother and grandmother were among the first to respond to the gospel in Paul's difficult visit to Lystra.(Acts 14:19,20) There is no mention of a response from Timothy's Greek father,(Acts 16:1) who in earlier years had been a distraction for his wife from her Jewish faith. This may be one reason why Paul had to step in to be the spiritual father Timothy needed. Paul remembers how when he returned to Lystra in Acts 14:21 and visited the same family he became aware that Timothy was ready to trust the Lord. He led him to Christ using the symbolism of laying hands on him to illustrate his professed submission to the authority of God.(I Pet.5:6) At that moment the Spirit came into Timothy's life. Paul reminds Timothy of what God's gift of His Spirit means. He has God's almighty power, not to destroy, but to love unconditionally and without limit. Discipline can be translated as 'sound judgement' or 'a sound mind'. Christ's mind in ours means a clear, stable, healthy way of thinking. The implications for those of us with psychological problems such as anxiety and depression are exciting. We do not know whether the reference to timidity in verse 7 and to being ashamed in verse 8 actually applied to Timothy or whether Paul was simply warning him about what could happen. Every day of our Christian lives we need to

avoid fear by rekindling the Holy Spirit like a fire which has burned low over night. More fuel is needed in the form of the word of God received wholeheartedly by faith.(1:5-7)

Paul uses the word 'suffering' more times in this letter than any other he wrote. He was suffering and he knows there is worse to come. He knows why these are hard times and that suffering was the normal consequence sooner or later of unashamedly proclaiming the message of the grace of Christ. He knows that very simply his message is a matter of life and death. Christ's coming has given us the opportunity of eternal life, of the light being switched on inside us. Sharing this message by every available means is his passion but it is going to cost him his own life. He knows he is committed to walking this path because of a mutual trust between him and God. He had entrusted his miserable, failed life to God and the Lord had entrusted the fabulous treasure of Christ' grace to him. His understanding of this treasure would continue to come through reading the word and holding it tight. The rekindled Holy Spirit within would enable him to be God's soldier on guard duty.(1:8-14)

The choice to be ashamed or not, to run away or to guard the treasure was being illustrated by three of Paul's friends. Phygelus and Hermogenes had turned away from Paul presumably because they were afraid to be associated with him and suffer. Onesiphorus on the other hand had been a faithful 'guard' who found Paul in prison and repeatedly came to help him. His reputation for service in Ephesus was well known to Timothy. In this he had led his whole family.(1:15-18)

QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER TWO

1. What does it mean to be strong in grace? What does strength without grace, or grace without strength look like in practice? How can we pass 'strong grace' on to others? Why in modern times do we often fail to do this effectively? What three pictures does Paul use to explain how Christian ministry should function? What is the particular point of each illustration?(2:1-7)
2. What will happen to all of us at times if we play the part of the soldier, the athlete or the farmer faithfully? Why will it be a benefit for others for us to undergo persecution for the gospel? What resources do we have to cope with suffering?(2:8-13)
3. What side-tracks do we easily fall into, thinking we are witnessing for Christ? What illustration does Paul use this time to describe the skill we need to learn to be an effective servant of Christ? How does Paul explain the danger of not learning this skill? How had Hymenaeus and Philetus made this mistake and with what consequence? What should we check about our Christian lives to be sure which path we are following?(1:14-19)
4. What visual aid does Paul use next to describe how we can serve Christ?(II Cor.4:7) What is the only important question we should ask about our usefulness in serving Christ? What are the characteristics of a dirty vessel and a clean one? What hope is there for those who have gone astray from the truth? How can we help them?(2:20-26)