Introduction to 2 Timothy

BE A GOOD SOLDIER OF CHRIST JESUS

(Suffer for the Gospel and Preach the Word)

Key Verse: 2:3

“Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”

*Author and place in Scripture*

Paul wrote 2 Timothy, and it is one of the Pastoral Epistles, along with 1 Timothy and Titus.

*Historical setting and Date*

Paul wrote this letter while alone in a Roman prison cell in chains like a criminal, awaiting execution (1:16; 2:9; 4:6b). This was his last imprisonment, which was quite different from his first one. According to Acts, his first imprisonment had been caused by the Jews in Judea; when he appealed to Caesar as a Roman citizen, he was sent to Rome in chains. He was there for two whole years under house arrest, where he ministered freely (Ac25:11; 28:30–31). But this last imprisonment seems to have been caused by Roman persecution. This time Paul had been deserted at his first defense (4:16) and almost fed to the lions (4:17b). Now, everyone in the province of Asia had deserted him (1:15), including one of his fellow workers, Demas (4:10; cf. Col4:14; Phm1:24). Only Luke was with him (4:11a). If scholars are correct in dating this letter sometime between A.D. 64-67, it was written during the first persecution of the Roman Empire against Christians.[[1]](#footnote--1)

*Purpose of writing*

Paul seems to have had two main purposes in writing 2 Timothy. His immediate purpose was to get Timothy to come to him quickly (4:9), bringing Mark (4:11), as well as his cloak, scrolls and parchments (4:13) before winter (4:21). But Paul’s main purpose was to help Timothy. Timothy had been Paul’s close associate since his second missionary journey some 15 years earlier (Ac16:3; 2Ti3:10–11). Timothy had proved himself as an unselfish, loyal and devoted gospel worker (Php2:20–22). Upon Paul’s counsel, he had stayed in Ephesus as the pastor of the church there (1Ti1:3). As mentioned in the Introduction to 1 Timothy, *“Paul sent him to various new churches to help with the ministry, such as in Berea (Ac17:13), Thessalonica (1Th3:2), likely Philippi (Ac19:22; Php2:19), and Corinth (Ac18:5; Ro16:21; 1Co4:17). Paul took Timothy with him on his journey to bring the offering from the Gentile believers to the saints in Jerusalem (Ac20:4). Timothy was with Paul as he wrote his letter to Philemon from a prison in Rome (Phm1:1). It is likely that after his release, when he went into Macedonia, Paul urged Timothy to stay in Ephesus to silence false teachers (1Ti1:3; 3:14). Sometime later, Timothy himself had even been imprisoned for the gospel (Heb13:23).”* Paul wrote this last letter of 2 Timothy to help Timothy at a time of intense persecution to be spiritually strong so that he could be a good solider of Christ Jesus, suffer for the gospel (1:8; 2:3), guard it (1:13–14), preach it (4:2), and keep the faith (4:7).

(For the Background of the city of Ephesus, the church in Ephesus, and the false doctrines there, as well as Paul’s presentation of sound doctrine, see the Introduction to 1 Timothy.)

*Characteristics of 2 Timothy:*

1. 2 Timothy is the last surviving letter Apostle Paul wrote, so it is seen as his last will and testament (4:6,9; 1:12; 4:18);
2. The letter of 2 Timothy has a very personal tone (e.g. 1:2,4–6,8,13; 2:1–2; 3:10–11,14–15; 4:9,13,21a);
3. In this letter Paul teaches Timothy some vital lessons as a young pastor: a) to fan into flame the gift of God (1:6); b) that the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline (1:7); c) to present himself to God as an approved worker and one who correctly handles the word of truth (2:15); d) to flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace (2:22); e) to have a strong appreciation for the Scriptures (3:14–17);
4. Paul admonishes Timothy to remember and teach the gospel of Jesus, using the words “remind,” “keep/guard,” “reflect/remember,” “keep reminding,” and “continue in” (1:6,13–14; 2:7–8,14; 3:14);
5. Paul uniquely mentions Timothy’s inherited faith (1:4–5; 3:15);
6. Paul mentions both good and bad examples of people in God’s ministry (1:5,15–18; 2:17; 3:8; 4:10–12,14–15,19–21);
7. Perhaps the most famous passage is Paul’s victorious finale (4:6–8,17–18).

*Themes:*

1. **Be a good soldier of Christ Jesus** (2:3–4) This image seems to encapsulate Paul’s main message in 2 Timothy. He teaches how to be a good soldier of Christ Jesus in several ways:
   1. **Suffer for the gospel**. A good soldier of Christ Jesus needs to suffer for the gospel. At the outset, Paul tells Timothy that the Spirit whom God gave us gives us the power, love and self-discipline to suffer for the gospel (1:7). Paul himself suffered for the gospel because of Jesus’ grace in his own life (1:8–9; 2:3). He encouraged Timothy to be strong in that same grace (2:1), and to join him in suffering for the gospel without being ashamed (1:8,12,16). To inspire us to suffer for the gospel, he gives illustrations not only of a soldier wanting to please his commanding officer, but also of an athlete and a hardworking farmer (2:3–6). Paul was even willing to be treated like a criminal for the gospel (2:9a). He gave a trustworthy saying that applies to all believers: “If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him” (2:11–12a). Timothy had seen firsthand Paul’s good example of suffering for the gospel (3:10–11). Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (3:12). In the midst of persecution and false teaching, Paul taught Timothy to “keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry” (4:5).
   2. **Serve God’s word**. A good soldier of Christ Jesus needs to learn how to serve the word of God. Paul himself was appointed by God to be a herald and an apostle and a teacher of the gospel, a servant of God’s word (1:11). Timothy had heard Paul’s gospel-centered Bible teaching and was charged to keep his words as the pattern of sound teaching, to guard it as a good deposit entrusted to him, and to pass it on to reliable people qualified to teach others (1:13; 2:2). Paul had a conviction that though he was in chains, God’s word is not chained (2:9b). Likewise, when we serve God’s word, God continues to work regardless of our human situation. To serve God’s word, Timothy first of all needed to do his best to present himself to God for his approval, and to learn how to correctly handle the word of truth (2:15). Timothy knew all about Paul’s life and teaching from the Bible (3:10–11). Based on this, Paul urged him to continue in the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make people wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (3:14–15). He famously stated that “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (3:16–17). In light of this, Paul charged Timothy: “Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction” (4:1–2). Even while on trial, Paul himself proclaimed the gospel message from the word of God, so that all the Gentiles might hear it (4:17). To serve God’s word, Timothy also needed to refute incipient and poisonous false teachings (2:14–18; 3:5–9,13; 4:3–4).
   3. **Keep/guard the faith**. A good soldier of Christ Jesus needs to keep/guard the faith. This faith is faith in Christ Jesus for salvation (3:15). But this faith does not put us on easy street. When we live by faith in Jesus, we will suffer persecution and many evil attacks (3:12; 4:18). Many will try to undermine, contradict and destroy our faith in Jesus, deceiving and being deceived, and strongly opposing our message, such as false teachers, deserters and lovers of this world, both within the Christian community and without (2:18; 3:8,13; 4:15). Keeping faith in Jesus is a matter of life or death. Throughout 2 Timothy we see Paul’s own faith as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. He fought the good fight, finished the race and kept the faith to the end (4:7). Anyone who wants to live as a good soldier of Christ Jesus needs to learn how to fight this good fight of faith. Paul recognized Timothy’s sincere faith and admonished him to guard the faith entrusted to him, by the help of the Holy Spirit (1:5,14). Though Timothy had faith, Paul admonished him nonetheless to “pursue” it also (2:22). Timothy could learn from Paul’s faith, which he had witnessed firsthand (3:10).
2. **Other pastoral ministry directives**. In this letter Paul gives Timothy some prominent directives as a pastor: 1) pass on the gospel teachings to reliable Bible teachers (2:2); 2) keep reminding God’s people of enduring for the gospel instead of falling into useless verbal debate (2:14); 3) gently teach opponents instead of quarreling with them (2:23–25); 4) do the work of an evangelist and discharge all the duties of God’s ministry (4:5).

*Purpose of our study*

Through this study we want to grow strong to endure all the sufferings and persecutions involved in living for the gospel of Jesus, and to grow as approved workers and servants of God’s word in our time who preach the word and are prepared in season and out of season. We especially want to learn from Apostle Paul’s good example of fighting the good fight and keep the faith to the end, looking ahead to the reward of God’s heavenly kingdom.

Outline of 2 Timothy

I. Introduction (1:1–7)

1. Apostle Paul and Timothy (1:1–2)
2. Paul’s prayer and thanksgiving for Timothy (1:3–5)
3. Paul’s encouragement for Timothy (1:6–7)

II. Join in suffering for the gospel (1:8–2:14a)

1. The gospel for which we suffer (1:8–10)
2. Paul’s personal conviction during suffering (1:11–12)
3. Guard the good deposit (1:13–14)
4. Onesiphorus, a loyal partner in suffering (1:15–18)
5. Be strong in Jesus’ grace (2:1)
6. Entrust the gospel to reliable people (2:2)
7. Suffer like a good soldier of Christ Jesus (2:3)
8. Illustrations on how to suffer (2:4–7)
9. Paul’s inspiration for suffering: Jesus and the elect (2:8–10)
10. God’s promises regarding suffering (2:11–14a)

III. Be a faithful and approved servant of God’s word and live a godly life (2:14b–4:8)

1. Avoid quarrels and godless chatter; correctly handle the word of truth (2:14b–18)
2. Be holy and useful to the Master (2:19–26)
3. Terrible times and false teachers (3:1–9)
4. Paul’s teaching and integrity (3:10–13)
5. Continue in the Holy Scriptures (3:14–17)
6. Preach the word in season and out of season (4:1–5)
7. Paul’s victorious finale (4:6–8)

IV. Personal remarks and final greetings (4:9–22)

1. Paul asks Timothy to come quickly, for many had left him (4:9–13)
2. Paul warns about Alexander (4:14–15)
3. The Lord stood at Paul’s side and rescued him from the lion’s mouth (4:16–18)
4. Paul’s final greetings (4:19–22)

1. In July, A.D. 64 the city of Rome burned for six days. Emperor Nero himself was suspected of starting the fire. But he shifted the blame on Christians, and soon they suffered mass execution. According to the Roman historian Tacitus, “Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired” (*Annals*, 15.44). [↑](#footnote-ref--1)