

# Moulton Parish Church



## Studies in 2 Timothy April – July 2008

## GROUP BIBLE STUDY

The priority of any Bible study is to seek to understand what the Bible is saying to the people to whom it was first written as well as to understand it for our particular day and generation. So, the top priority is first to understand the text and then to make it meaningful and relevant. Here are some pointers to help you as you study the Bible:

### PRAY

Our preparation for any Bible study should begin and end with prayer. We need to ask God, through the help of the Holy Spirit, to guide us as we read the Bible and prepare for a study.

### ASK

In order to understand the Bible properly, we need to keep in mind six important questions:

1. **Who is speaking?** Everything in the Bible was written by men who were inspired by God. Though every writer of the Bible was inspired by God, sometimes the writers record words which come from the hearts of evil men. So, dealing with the question "Who is speaking?" will help us to know whether the words we are reading are words that we should obey today.
2. **Who is spoken to?** We need to realise that not every command that comes in the Bible is a command for us today. For example, the command by God to Noah to build an ark is obviously pertinent and relevant for Noah, but not for us.
3. **When is the Bible writer speaking?** In answering this question, we will need to make a distinction between those who are living under the law and those who live under the guidelines and principles as outlined to us in the New Testament, the way of Christ. Therefore, the principles we see

with regards to worship in the Old Testament have a relevance to us, but we need to read them in the light of the New Testament. It is always important to bear in mind that one part of the Bible can often help us to understand another part.

4. **What type of language is the writer using?** The languages used are usually one of two types: either literal or figurative. Sometimes both will be mixed together in one passage – for example, Jesus is spoken of as the Lamb of God, which is clearly a figurative form of speech. However, he is also described as the one who takes away the sin of the world, which is literally true for those who believe. So, Jesus was not an actual lamb, but he was the one who became the offering for our sins.

5. **What are the conditions or circumstances in which this writing is given?** If we can get to grips with the particular circumstances the writer is facing when he writes, it helps us to understand what he is saying.

6. **What is the context of the Bible passage?** Think about what has just been said and what is about to be said in the particular book of the Bible, as well as the context of the Bible passage within the whole of the Bible.

The Bible is indeed God's inspired word – it is his revelation to all mankind. So, in order for us to understand the Bible we must seek to study it properly. Only then can we "*correctly handle the word of truth*". And if we keep these six simple questions in mind as we prepare our study, we will find that we can indeed get to grips with God's word.

## PLAN

For those who are preparing and leading a study, the following steps should prove helpful:

1. Try to break the passage into parts or sections so that you can clearly divide up the passage you are looking at.

2. Think about what you don't understand in the passage and therefore what others might not understand as well. What parts do you need to gain more background and information about? Be ready to deal with puzzles that people will ask you about. So, for example, when studying John 3, people might ask 'What is the kingdom of God?', 'What is a Pharisee?'. These are obvious things that people might need to have some more information about.

3. Having broken the passage up into sections, we then come to thinking about questions. You can use the questions that are in this book. However, you may want to write your own, which is of course perfectly all right. Questions can be one of three types.

A **Understanding.** The first type of question should be aimed at trying to draw out our understanding of what the passage is saying.

B **Significance.** Only once we have begun to understand the passage can we move on to questions that try to highlight the significance of the passage in the light of the particular book or letter, and of course against the backdrop of the whole Bible.

C **Application.** Then we move on to questions which apply to the situations we are facing today.

## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

- Do make use of clergy and commentaries and other Christians who have a maturity which you can rely upon when you are seeking to tackle Bible passages.
- It will sometimes prove helpful to have more than one translation as this will give you some fresh insights into the verses which you are focusing on.
- As we come to study the Bible we need to keep in mind that all the books of the Bible have one great theme: that is God's plan to save mankind from his sins through Jesus Christ.
- Fundamentally, make sure that whatever you do, you seek to do it to honour and glorify God.

Let us not forget::

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”  
2 Timothy 3:16-17.

## Background to 2 Timothy

This letter of Paul to Timothy is usually referred to as one of the Pastoral Epistles. This is to say, it is one of the letters Paul wrote, not so much to individual churches, but to individual leaders about the shape and direction of their pastoral ministry. It has been a significant letter in the life of the church for nearly 2,000 years and has given much insight into how ministers should be working with those around them.

This is Paul's last letter. Paul is now a prisoner in Rome on trial for his life, knowing that at any moment he may face his death. Paul is writing to his favourite son in the faith, Timothy, who has settled at Ephesus as a pastor/teacher and who had a special place in Paul's affections and concern. You will recall the letter to the Ephesians which was to play such a vital role, not only in the life of the Ephesian church, but also across the church for 2,000 years. It is clear from both 1 and 2 Timothy that Paul has a deep love and concern for this young man (1 Timothy 1:3). As you read through the letter, that this is also very personal to Timothy and full of good advice, strong teaching and challenges for his pastoral ministry. While Paul is conscious that he is now handing on his work, he is also conscious that these may be some of the very last opportunities that he will have to give clear Christian teaching to the next generation.

### Destination and purpose:

Titus was on the island of Crete when Paul wrote to him (Titus 1:5). Timothy had been left to guide the church at Ephesus. Paul almost certainly wrote his first letter after his visit to Macedonia (1 Timothy 1:3). He writes this second letter in Rome, recognising that his death is round the corner. This brings us to the purpose behind the letter. Timothy had been one of Paul's long-time companions. He had been with Paul towards the end of his first imprisonment in Rome (Philippians 2:19-24). After this, Paul returned to Crete and Ephesus, then left Titus in Crete and Timothy in Ephesus. Both of them encountered false teachers who had virtually taken over the local churches. This was in line with Paul's predictions to the Ephesians (Acts 20:29-30). He left

Timothy in charge of the church, giving him instructions how to deal with those false teachers.

At this stage Paul writes again to Timothy, shortly before his death, imprisoned and chained in Rome. The letter itself has a twofold purpose. Firstly, he is lonely and longs for Timothy to come to Rome and support him during this time of trial. It seems as if no one else could quite meet Paul's needs like Timothy, but since he is about to die he knows that also he must encourage Timothy to continue in the ministry he has begun. Clearly, the theme of Paul's last letter is bound up in the fact that he is about to die and that he is writing to a close colleague. From the letter we find that the apostle Paul is more interested in making sure that Timothy is prepared to carry on the work than to recount his own achievements. Time and again, two key words will hit home to us: endurance and faithfulness in the truth. We might sum up the whole letter thus: "persevere in the proclamation of the gospel".

You will remember that Timothy, though Paul's junior, was one of his most trusted friends and fellow-workers. At this point they have been separated. Paul is now writing to give Timothy strong advice as well as much needed encouragement. If we wanted to summarise Paul's message, we could do no better than turn to 2 Timothy 2:1-2. *"You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others"*. Paul's great passion is that the truth and nothing but the truth need to be held and to be passed on. His over-riding ambition is that the Gospel will be clearly held, neither altered nor maligned, and successfully passed on to the next generation. You can see at once that this is also very relevant to our situation today. As you study this book, you will see an older Christian writing to a younger Christian, not just to give advice but also to give encouragement.

Everywhere in the church there were false teachers at work, denying the central doctrines of the apostolic faith (2 Timothy 2:17-19). Paul sees a dreadful prospect of moral decline in the church, culminating in its moving away from the Gospel and no longer being willing to accept or hold on to orthodox teaching. It

is both surprising and shocking to our ears to learn that, as Paul's life comes to an end, the work at which he had laboured for most of his life seems now at the point of collapse. It is only God and his Word that will be critical and crucial for this ministry to continue and to be effective.

All that Paul has to set against this decline is Timothy and a few other faithful teachers. Timothy, not always in the best of health nor always very confident, has been entrusted with this word and this work. Amazingly, God is planning to use someone so weak as his human agent. In turn, this will display the very power of God.

In 2 Timothy, Paul is preparing to face his death but he leaves this world in the confidence that, by the power of God's Spirit, by the grace of Jesus Christ and the sufficiency of Scripture, there are enough resources to enable the church to persevere and for the Good News of Jesus Christ to spread across the world.

I am sure that you will find this letter extremely helpful if for no other reason, because it is very down to earth. I hope that, with me, you will find that it is of great encouragement and will keep us on track, seeking to serve our Saviour and our Lord.

## Outline to 2 Timothy:

1. The Greeting (1:1-2)
2. Paul's situation, signs of encouragement, 1:3-18
3. Paul's call to faithful staying power, 2:1-26
  - 3.1. The calling to stick at it, 2:1-13
  - 3.2. The calling to be faithful 2:14-26
4. Charged to live in the light of the last day 3:1-4:8
  - 4.1. Unbelief in the last days 3:1-9
  - 4.2. Preaching the word in the last days 3:10-4:8
5. Paul's final comments 4:9-22

## Suggested Further Reading:

1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, part of the Focus on the Bible Series by Douglas J W Milne

The Message of 2 Timothy: Guard the Gospel by John R W Stott, Bible Speaks Today

Passing on the Truth: 1 and 2 Timothy Simply Explained by M Bentley, Welwyn Commentary

## Study 1: His Dear Fellow Worker 2 Timothy 1:1-18

### Introduction

Paul writes this letter in the final days of his life. He has not lost the focus that he is an apostle and called by God, chosen and set apart for this particular life's work. He is seeking to make sure that the message of the Gospel goes out into the world. The letter begins with a greeting that is very similar to the one that is found at the start of the first letter to Timothy. Paul right away identifies himself as *'an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God'*. Paul knows that it is God who has called him, and that it is from God alone that he has received grace, mercy and peace. Paul recognises that all spiritual life comes to us only *'in Christ'*. So the clearer we know how we are to live, namely in him, the richer our lives will become.

In v2 Paul now speaks of Timothy as *'my dear son'*. This is an expression of Paul's warm affection in which he holds Timothy.

In vv3-7 Paul expresses thanksgiving for the work that God is doing. Just as in his first letter, Paul follows his regular practice of having a thanksgiving right after the greeting. Paul was indeed a servant of God but he also recognises the heritage in which he has grown up. That is something that we should appreciate here in England today. Paul gives us a wonderful picture of the prayer life that he has for Timothy. He is constantly remembering him in his prayers. Paul must have been an amazing man to carry around so many people in his heart and constantly to bring them before God in prayer. Surely he is an example to us believers today that we too should be lifting one another up in prayer. In v4 we are told that Paul is recalling Timothy's tears. These tears no doubt flowed at their last parting. We glimpse here something of the humanity of this great man of God. Yes, Paul was a faithful servant of Christ. But also a servant with a very loving heart.

In v5 Paul reminds us how faith first made its home in Timothy's life and of the important work that family can play in nurturing young people in the Christian faith. Surely there is a challenge to us here in recognising that God can use close relationships to encourage us in our own faith.

In v6-8 there is a focus on God's gift to Timothy. In v6 we already have the reminder of the sincere faith and spiritual heritage in which Timothy has grown up and developed. Paul now encourages him to fan into flame the very gift that God has given to him and which was placed upon him by the laying on of hands. This passage reminds us that not all our gifts come to us automatically, but rather that sometimes they will need to be discovered, developed and encouraged. In 1 Timothy 3:14, Paul reminded him not to neglect his gift and that he should stir it up to kindle the flame so that it might flourish.

In v7 we see Paul's very positive statement unfold in three parts. Firstly, Paul says that God has not given us a spirit of timidity but rather a spirit of power, of love and self-discipline. What we learn here is that the Christian worker must have the power of the Holy Spirit to be effective in his labours for God. The power of the Holy Spirit is to be expressed in a loving and kind way. So in light of the Spirit Timothy has been given by the Lord, Paul now urges him not to be ashamed to testify about our Lord or to be ashamed of Paul, the Lord's prisoner. It seems almost certain that the Apostle at this stage was a prisoner of the Emperor Nero. Certainly, by coming to Paul and associating with him Timothy would put his own life on the line. Could that be the reason why Paul encourages him not to be ashamed to visit Paul in prison in Rome?

### **Paul's Story**

The Apostle now reminds us that it is God who saves us and calls us to live a holy life. How is this to be done? By God's grace and not by our work. This is a wonderful free gift from God, not because of anything we deserve: - no, the initiative has been taken by God from first to last. It is Jesus himself who brings us from death to life. This is the Gospel, the Good News that we are to testify about and to be ready to suffer for and not be ashamed

of. As v11 now so aptly reminds us, it is for this Gospel that Paul himself was appointed *'a herald and an apostle and a teacher'*. Once again we have a threesome coming to the fore. In v12 Paul reminds us that he was appointed as a preacher of the Gospel and that it has a cost both to suffer and to face persecution. How can Paul face such a time? We are told *'because I know whom I have believed and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.'* Paul is convinced not because he knows what he believes but because he knows whom he believes. The Gospel is ultimately about knowing God and having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, his Son, our Lord.

### **Paul's Charge, 13-14**

Paul now outlines a pattern for Timothy to adopt and follow. What Timothy had heard and learned from Paul he was to keep as a pattern of sound teaching. How? Simply by faith and love in Jesus Christ. Timothy was to guard the *'good deposit'*. Paul sees that it is vital that the Gospel is maintained as being true and unsullied by false teaching and impurities. Paul was giving Timothy the task to preach the Gospel and to ensure that the doctrine was preserved. None of this would be possible without the power and work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

### **Paul – deserted and befriended 15-18**

During a time like the present time, when false teachers were corrupting the Gospel and encouraging people that they needed Jesus but also needed to add things to him, Timothy was to protect the Gospel of grace. We need to see deeper and realise that ultimately it is God who is the one who will guard the Gospel, so Timothy can be confident that it is God who will sustain him. It must have been heart-breaking for Paul to tell Timothy in v15 that Christians had deserted him. Perhaps this had happened when he was arrested and then taken to Rome.

How can we be encouraged? As we look onto vv16-18 we see a sharp contrast. Here we learn again of the kindness of the household of Onesiphorus. The name meant *'help bringer'* and here was a person who had lived up to his name. When this Christian man had come to Rome he had searched hard for Paul until he finally found him. There were many prisoners in Rome so

it cannot have been an easy task. But here was a Christian who wanted to show support and encouragement to the Apostle. I believe these verses give us a helpful insight into how lonely and abandoned the Apostle Paul must have felt in those days.

## Questions for Study 1

This was Paul's last letter: one of deep affection 'to Timothy, my dear son' (1:2)

Q1. What do we learn from these opening verses (1-7) about the Gospel that God has given? What facts emerge that show Paul's care for Timothy?

Q2. What key phrases or verses stand out to you as important in this opening chapter? Look at vv8-12: what has Christ achieved for us?

Q3. What was Timothy encouraged to do in vv5-6? Why is it sometimes important to remind a Christian friend about the reality of his/her faith in Jesus? How would you respond to a discouraged friend who said, 'I don't think God has given me any particular gift'? (see also 1 Corinthians 12:4-12, 28-31; Ephesians 4:11-13; Romans 12:4-8.)

Q4. We are called to guard the Gospel. How do we do that? Do you see yourself as a worker / soldier / minister / missionary playing a role in God's grand plan? Why or why not? Why are faith and love (13) important accessories to 'sound teaching' or doctrine?

Q5. What place does suffering have in the Christian life (vv15-18)? Our church leaders may not be in prison, but why might they need encouraging and how can we provide that encouragement?

## Study 2: Soldiers, Athletes and Farmers 2 Timothy 2:1-13

### Introduction

I believe the activity of Christians in any generation is to guard the Gospel which has been given to them. This was the great charge that the Apostle Paul gave to Timothy: *‘Guard the good deposit that has been entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us’* (1:14).

In chapter 2 Paul goes on to explore four particular avenues by which this guarding of the Gospel can be achieved. An important principle that may well come from these studies is that we see how important it is that we in our own generation have the responsibility also of guarding the Gospel and passing it on.

The world in which Timothy was growing up and in which now he had been called to be a minister was one which had distorted values, misleading commitments, confused thinking and dangerous misconceptions. We know that the Roman world was about to explode with violence. In the east, the Jewish revolt would soon break out culminating with armies going to besiege Jerusalem. The temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed and thousands of Jews would be killed. All these events are literally just around the corner.

We also live in a deeply troubled world. Across society in many strands there is a deep level of despair. We see this with young people who lose hope for the future, maybe burdened by debt and the fear of failure. There are many other appearances of a disturbed culture – child abuse, pornography, crime, violence between nations and corruption in both public and business life. The question that Paul addresses in this chapter is one that is very relevant to us: how can we guard the Gospel in such a generation?

The Apostle Paul now continues with his encouragement to Timothy in this chapter, with the focus on endurance and diligence. He wants to encourage Timothy to be strong in the grace that he has been given in Christ Jesus. He urges Timothy to commit himself to what he learned from the faithful people who had given it to him long ago (vv1-2).

In v3-13, Paul uses a series of illustrations to press this point home so that Timothy in may press it home to others. The Apostle uses the illustration of a soldier, an athlete and a farmer to be an encouragement to Timothy to endure hard work, to be faithful and to face hardship. This is underlined by the fact that Paul himself would face hardship and stress because he needed to be faithful to the Lord who had called him into his service.

### **Paul charges Timothy to pass on the truth, 1-2:**

In v1, Paul makes a strong plea to Timothy to be strong. This is based on the fact that Timothy is his son, not literally his biological son, but his son in the sense that Paul has been his spiritual father. This plea is also built on the grace that has been given to Timothy by Jesus Christ. The key here is that we need to have our faith built on a strong relationship with the living God.

In v2, Paul stresses the importance of passing on the Gospel, the truth, to yet more others. *And the things you have heard me say, in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.* Timothy is to bear the great responsibility of communicating the truth to others. Our responsibility today is to do this very same work. We must communicate the truth not only to our children but also to our friends and neighbours.

Though the preacher has an important part to play in this task, it is the responsibility of every Christian. All expected to be communicators of the truth and to pass on what we ourselves have become convinced is true. So the chapter is opened with this great call to communicate the truth to others.

### **Now the call is to endure hardship, 3-13:**

Paul quickly gives us three solid illustrations of what he is seeking to press home to Timothy. He uses a soldier, an athlete and a farmer to make his point. He calls on Timothy to endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ (v3). We are not to get ourselves entangled with the affairs of this life (v4). Why? Because we are to seek to please the one who has called us into his service, Jesus Christ himself (v4).

After using the illustration of a good soldier, Paul now picks up the picture of an athlete following the rules of a competition in order to win the prize (v5). Then he uses the next picture of a hard-working farmer who will be the first to partake in the harvest that comes (v6). These three very clear illustrations say one thing to us: in a world that is in such a mess, Christians must commit themselves without reservation to obeying Jesus Christ. The Apostle's charge to Timothy and to us is that we are to give ourselves wholly to God. So the challenge for us as we study this passage and seek to live out the truths that it is teaching is that we are to live a Christian life-style wherever God has placed us. We will realise that if we are to undertake this, then we will need the dedication of a soldier, the discipline of an athlete and the diligence of a farmer.

Paul concludes the first part of our study in v7 by saying *'Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this'*. In short – we are to meditate and reflect on what Paul has been saying to us. The key is for us not only to grasp what the passage says but also to think about how these principles will fit into the way in which we should be living.

In the final part of our study Paul turns to focus on himself as an example to Timothy from which he can learn. It is said, *'when the going gets tough, the tough get going'*. But is it true? All too often when we are going through a tough and difficult time, we wonder what has gone wrong. We need to grasp that suffering comes as part of being a Christian.

In v8-13 Paul writes about one quality that is needed by Timothy and all of us – endurance. The idea behind Paul's thinking is that

we are called not to run away, rather to stand our ground (1 Corinthians 15:58). The idea of endurance and standing our ground is not a very common Christian teaching and does not often come into a Christian's testimony. But, when we read through the New Testament, we find time and again that in the face of both persecution and suffering Christians showed this ability to endure and to stand their ground even against tremendous pressure. (Peter - 1 Peter 2:20; James – James 5:11). Look at v8. Why does Paul say *'remember Jesus Christ'*? When we are going through a tough time, don't forget Jesus. We need to hang onto the facts of his resurrection, of his great heritage and of the suffering he endured for us.

Not only think of Jesus, also think of Paul (v9). He himself was chained to a Roman guard in a prison. Although he could rightly have felt frustrated, he was not because the word of God could not be bound. Paul is saying, *'even though you are going through a hard time, don't forget me!'* It seems amazing that here was a faithful Christian who had been seeking to proclaim the Gospel and where do we find him? In prison! However, the Apostle was prepared to put up with any amount of pain if it meant that people would become Christians. We need to remind ourselves that he would not have endured this suffering if he did not believe that the Gospel was supremely worth the cost.

Paul closes this section with a faithful saying to encourage us in this time of hardship (v11-13). Here we find four clear statements:

<i>if we died with him</i>	<i>then we will also live with him</i>
<i>if we endure</i>	<i>we will also reign with him</i>
<i>if we disown him</i>	<i>he will also disown us</i>
<i>if we are faithless</i>	<i>he will remain faithful for he cannot disown himself.</i>

Note the amazing promise *if we died with him, we shall also live with him.*

Note also the terrible warning: *if we disown him, he will disown us.*

Lastly, a word of hope. *‘If we are faithless, he will remain faithful’*. Paul’s challenge to Timothy is that he wants every Christian to draw on the grace of Jesus Christ to be committed, determined, hard-working and ready to endure anything for the Gospel.

## Questions for Study 2

Chapter 1 encouraged us by telling us that God is well able to cope with our weaknesses. The help offered by God is his grace.

Q1. Why is grace important for Timothy (vv1-7)? Can you outline the four aspects of service referred to in vv2-7 for which Christ’s strength is necessary?

Q2. What hardships are Christians likely to face for Christ? Why is Christ’s grace/strength essential when it comes to enduring hardships? (see vv3-4).

Q3. One characteristic of a farmer is that he keeps going - fair weather or foul (v6). What does this imply in Christian service? As God’s servant, Timothy had this fourfold challenge. If you had to set this in order of importance for yourself how would you arrange them? Why?

Q4 Turning to look at vv8-13, what two facts does Paul state about Jesus Christ in v8? How does ‘remembering’ (v8) or concentrating on Jesus Christ help us to endure (vv10-12)? What effect does concentrating on Jesus Christ have (Hebrews 12:2-4)?

## Study 3: How to Please God 2 Timothy 2:14-26

### Introduction

If there is a need in the life of the church today then it is a need for discernment! It can be amazing to observe mature Christians in action, saying the right things and in many ways going on with God, but suddenly even a mature Christian can show an incredible lack of discernment. It is all too easy for all of us at some stage or other to get caught up in some new teaching or some new attitude. Sadly such an attitude or approach shows that our discernment has gone right out of the window! We can end up like a ship being tossed to and fro by the wind and the waves.

You have heard the phrase "you are what you eat". Let me change that just a little bit, "you are what you think!" If our thinking about God goes wrong then our living for God will also go wrong. The Apostle Paul longs that Timothy will be used by God. All of us who are undertaking these studies in 2 Timothy should have a similar desire. The first thing that Paul focuses on in this section is a need for discernment, he longs that Timothy will have discernment over the truth and all other matters which affect Christian living.

### Discernment for the Truth, 14-19

As they grow up, all children do become wiser. Children quickly learn the secret that, if they want to stay up later, they need to is side-track Mum and Dad at bedtime. Then, all of a sudden, they have something important to tell us or they have a question which just needs answering **right now** . . . Parents have got to use discernment to know which important questions must be answered and which are merely clever attempts to side-track us from the object of getting our children into bed.

The Apostle Paul tells Timothy to avoid the things which side-track us from our main goal. What is the main goal? In v15 we

are told that our priority is not rushing round looking for false truths, our business is to know the real thing. Many a Christian can wreck their Christian life because they have not sought to know the truth. Too many Christians can get diverted along the way and feel weak about sharing their faith because they have not really understood their own faith in the first place. All too easily we can be like a boat, tossed around in a heavy swell of sea, leaving us sea-sick and confused. This could sum up many Christians today. One question arising from these studies is "do you know what you believe and why?" Quite a good test for any of us is this: if someone stopped us in the street as we left church, could we explain to them in a simple way our faith in Jesus?

The business of the church is to teach the truth. Of course we know that it must oppose error and highlight false teaching, but its first job and priority is to point people back to God and to his truth. This is what Paul wanted Timothy to do so we are to be involved in teaching the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth!

In vv16-18, the Apostle highlights not so much a side-track as a different track altogether. This is not part of God's truth at all. He begins by warning us against "godless chatter". This is dangerous because it is not linked with God and his truth. I guess most of us have experienced this in one form or another when we have turned on our televisions, listened to our radios or opened a newspaper. All too often it is nothing less than godless chatter that can lead away from God and his truth. The Apostle tells us that such thinking leads to ungodliness. I believe that one of our priorities as a Church should be to pray more that the truth will be taught in our schools and colleges. Godlessness is a bit like gangrene: unless treated, it will destroy the victim. So Paul is right to warn us to be on our guard against godless chatter.

In vv17-18, the Apostle singles out two members of the church for special attention. He tells us plainly that these two church teachers had swerved away from the truth. They had interpreted the resurrection just as a spiritual quickening or an experience in the past linked to conversion, thus missing the truth of a future physical resurrection from the dead. The same ideas are actually

in circulation today. All too often people believe that they can update the Bible. They say that what was the truth in Paul's day no longer applies now. Paul's challenge and encouragement is to discern the truth by reminding us and encouraging us that the Lord knows who are his.

So the challenge in vv14-19, is discernment of the truth.

### **A Call to Holy Living, 20-23**

Paul wants to flag up a second principle with which he wants to encourage Timothy: it is in regard to holiness. Paul does this firstly by reminding Timothy with a quote: "*Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness*". A Christian who is committed, determined, hard-working and enduring, who even has discernment, but whose lifestyle is a disgrace to Christ in matters of morality or the fruit of the spirit or Christian grace is of no earthly use to the Lord. This echoes what the Apostle was saying in 1 Corinthians 13.

How can God use a person to spread the Good News of the grace of Christ and of the transforming power of the Spirit, if that person is dishonest at work, violent at home, has extra-marital relationships or loves himself or herself so as to be puffed up with pride? God cannot use such a person. The Apostle gives Timothy a picture of a home. We are at that house and Jesus is the master of the house and he wants to spring clean the house from top to bottom. The question is: will we let him? There are times when we can see ourselves being drawn into activities or relationships which will damage our relationship with God. Paul has a word for them, namely shun them! What does he say? He tells us to run away. This was surely the lesson that Joseph had to learn when he ran from Potiphar's wife. Not only are we to run away from all that is evil, we are encouraged here to run after all that makes for a holy lifestyle (v22). God longs for you and me to be holy. We cannot be holy if we keep one foot in the world and one foot in the life of the church.

### **Sensitivity in Witnessing, 23-26**

Paul uses three particular titles to describe the kind of person that God can use in his kingdom. The first is the Lord's servant.

Notice that we are not called to be the Lord's master, a servant is sensitive to what his Lord wants. We are called to be sensitive to all that God longs for. This means that we will need to be discerning, concerned for God's truth.

The second title is that of being a nurse (kind to everyone). We are not to be quarrelsome with others. The nurse's priority is the person they are caring for. This shows us that evangelism is to be undertaken lovingly and with great care. A family with small children, coming to church for the first time, should not be made to feel unwelcome. Our job is to nurse people to faith not put barriers in their way. Again, the issue is one of discernment.

The third title is to be a teacher. We can only teach if we know the Christian faith ourselves and we keep it fresh in our minds. We need to see that merely throwing out Bible verses will never cause anyone to come to Christ. No, you must go further. You must be ready and willing to demonstrate your love for God by caring for them and being ready when the time is right to share your faith by addressing their questions and issues.

Let us be ready servants of God, seeking his discernment. May we be faithful as he is faithful.

The challenge of these verses is one of discernment. We need this quality within the life of the church and amongst God's people and also as a church as we look out to the world, seeking to proclaim and make Christ known.

## Questions for Study 3

In the last study (2:1-13) God's grace was seen as a vital factor to help us serve. We now think about our work as God's servants.

### The need for a firm foundation, 14-19

Q1. What are the major responsibilities for Timothy? What is Paul's advice to Timothy, so that he can be better equipped to deal with the problems he is facing? How have you managed problems when confronted with situations that you have not felt yourself well equipped to handle?

Q2. Why is our handling of the Bible so important? What are some of the pitfalls for teachers?

### The need for commitment, 20-26

Q3. What kind of person is God anxious to have in his house (v21)? How does a person change from being 'ignoble' to 'noble'? (v21)

Q4. In what ways had these individuals been changed from 'useless' to 'useful'? In what ways can we be 'useful' to God in our local church?

Q5. As believers, what positive things should we be aiming at? The first four are in v22. The next three priorities are in v24. The eighth priority is in v25. Try putting the priorities in order of importance.

## Study 4: Taking the right course in our Culture, 2 Timothy 3:1-17

### Introduction

This chapter can be divided into two main headings and then each section can be sub-divided into two. The first section can be described as 'the characteristics of the last days' (1-9). On the one hand, the focus is on the love of money and pleasure; on the other, the focus is on the nature of the way in which people live and think. The second half of the chapter is focussed on persecution and steadfastness: all Christians will face persecution but the significance and importance of Scripture will help to give us support when under pressure.

The opening section of this chapter focuses on the need to understand the world around us. We see the effect of a godless society and the breakdown of normal relationships between people: people will be lovers of self and money. This is replicated in our own society with the need for 24 hour drinking and shopping 7 days a week. Sadly, family life has become mangled: disobedience to parents is openly tolerated, ingratitude and unholy living seems to be the norm. The surprise come in v5 where we are jolted awake by the realisation that all these sins are being manifested within the life of the Church.

The Apostle's words "*the last days*" describe that period between Christ's ascension and his second coming. It is a phrase that often appears in the Old Testament (Isaiah 2:2). Paul unveils before us that these last days will be terrible times. What is quite staggering is that the vices mentioned are no fewer than eighteen in number. These are the particular characteristics of the people who will live through such a time. This will be a period of intense stress, immediately before the return of Christ.

Please understand that Paul is not pushing these issues into the far and distant future. No, he is revealing that this is the time and the period of the last days. These are the days in which we live. Sadly, love will become misplaced into self, money and pleasure (vv2-4) rather than a life and love for God. The stress of the breakdown of human relationships not only breaks our relationship with God, it also seeks to ruin relationships with those around us.

Timothy was facing these problems in the church at Ephesus. Apparently some people were worming their way into the homes of weak-willed women. Paul underlines the fact that these false teachers were exploiting the vulnerability of those for whom they had a responsibility to care and to teach. It appears that their aim was probably financial gain. Surely we see this in our own day and age when many of the contemporary religious cults and heresies are similarly financed by these methods. Paul flags up two particular teachers who are from this very brand, Jannes and Jambres, the names of the two chief magicians who appeared in Pharaoh's court at the time of Moses (Exodus 7:11). These two impostors opposed Moses because he was a channel of God's word to the court of Pharaoh. The implication Paul's words is to draw an historical link back to the time of Moses and the false teachers of their day with those who oppose the truth today. Paul, in linking himself back to Moses, is making a direct connection by comparing himself with Moses.

Although these people are attempting to undermine God, what we actually find is that they themselves will ultimately be rejected by God (v8). Paul reminds Timothy not to panic but rather to be confident that error will be routed by the truth. We need to realise and understand that we do not need to focus on the error but rather grasp more firmly the truth of God which is sharper than any two-edged sword and will certainly deal with any heresy that comes our way. These opening 9 verses remind us not to be taken in by some false godliness.

In the next section of vv10-17 Paul gives us his response to this false teaching so as to enable us to remain fully committed to the truth. He reminds his readers not only about his teaching but also about his way of life and purpose (v10). The qualities of

Christian service need to be held in balance with the implications of being a faithful witness in such a time as this. Paul is graciously reminding us that suffering for the Gospel is part of the Christian life. We need constantly to remind ourselves that living for God is difficult when the world is hostile. We should not be surprised if the world seeks to mock, ridicule or outwardly attack our stand of faith when we make our commitment to Christ known publicly. It is all too easy to be thrown off balance when we find ourselves under pressure and persecution and things do not seem to be working out the way we planned. We may well ask the question "Why don't people like me? Where have I gone wrong?" According to the Apostle such persecution may actually be a sign that we have got it right, that we are living faithfully and are proclaiming the Gospel and that God is with us.

How do we gain such a confidence and commitment to God? From the verses that follow, vv14-17, we learn of Paul's uncompromising confidence in the truth of the Scriptures. Firstly in v14 we learn that it needs to be worked on. In Timothy's case, he had been read the Scriptures from his earliest days (2 Timothy 1:5). The Bible and Christian teaching are not an emotional roller coaster, rather God wants to engage our minds so that they develop the qualities and characteristics which reflect the One we follow, namely Jesus Christ. It is only the certainties of the Bible that will ultimately motivate us for a lifetime of service for God in this world. Passing fancies may well seem attractive, but Paul knows that the young pastor and, for that matter the young Christian, will easily be blown off course if they allow their emotions to be in the driving seat. As far as the world is concerned, to be a teacher of the Bible and to learn the Scriptures, seem at best sometimes boring but hardly ever exciting. Yet this is the very work that we are called to do, to keep on teaching and learning from the Bible when contemporary notions seem much more exciting. It is the only way that we will equip ourselves and also the people of God to serve him in the world (v17).

In vv16-17 we are given the classic statement of Christian orthodoxy, the significance and importance of the Bible (*All Scripture is God-breathed*). This is to encourage us to trust every page of the Bible as God's written word. The breath of God (the

Holy Spirit) is the ultimate author of all the Scriptures. It is he who expresses in words the will and mind of God to the human mind. The very words of God are like a breath, filling the sail of the boat and so driving the mind of the writer to write down the mind of God as he guides God's people into God's truth. Remember it is our very breath that allows us to utter words and thus express our inner thoughts.

All the words that we find here in these two verses (16 and 17) are very important. We have two significant truths about Scripture. The first concerns its origin (where it comes from) and the second its purpose (what it is intended for).

1. *"All Scripture is God-breathed"*. This means that it is inspired by God. Please note that Scripture is not only inspired, it is also profitable. We need to ask ourselves "What does it mean by the phrase *'all Scripture?'*" We must appreciate that every part of the Bible originated in the mind of God and he is seeking to communicate with us his thoughts by his Spirit.

2. The purpose of Scripture: it is profitable because it is inspired by God. The origin has a divine source. It is for the benefit of mankind. In particular it instructs us in the way of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Since the Bible is the book of salvation and since this salvation is coming through Christ, the Bible focuses its attention on Jesus Christ. For every aspect of the Christian life, the Bible is the means of enabling any servant of the Lord to find all that they need so that they may be faithful in the service and work that God requires of them. The Spirit of God still takes the word of God to make children of God (v15). Friends we will find no other substitute for the Bible. It gives us clearly the word of God and the mind of God in ways that we can understand. In v17 we see the purpose of this, that the *"man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work"*.

## Questions for Study 4

Paul paints a picture of how our culture will degenerate with the passage of time. It is a debasing culture that could ruin Timothy's life and that of the church (v5).

Q1. Decadence has its own kind of love. What are they described as loving in vv1-4? In particular their love is focused on what four things? Why is self-love destructive? What does this kind of love do to people? (see Acts 5:1, 2 and Luke 12:13-20). How is this attitude expressed in today's culture? And with what results?

Q2. Look at the other characteristics mentioned in vv2-4. How do these describe everyday life? How is this illustrated in the lives of various Old and New Testament characters? (see Exodus 7:6-13 and 2 Corinthians 11:13-15). How is it expressed in people today? What about the effects of the affluent society on us, the influence also of the mass media, relativism and a permissive society? How are we to cope with its influences?

Q3. *'The last days'* (v1) may be understood as the period between Christ's ascension and his second coming, with an escalation of evil. How has God already demonstrated this?

Q4. Paul lists nine aspects in his life with which Timothy is familiar (vv10-11). What are they? Why are they important to the believer? Why is a personal example important? Who are we shaping and encouraging (v15)?

Q5. What encouragement do you find in these verses for trying to get people to read the Bible - both Old and New Testaments? (see Luke 24:44-45 and Acts 8:26-35). How might you use Isaiah 53 to point someone towards salvation?

Q6. What do you understand by *'All Scripture is God-breathed'* (v16 and 2 Peter 1:20-21)? Why is this an important truth for us to understand? What is Scripture designed to achieve (v17)?

## Study 5: Keep Going 2 Timothy 4:1-8

These are the final words of the Apostle Paul to Timothy. It is both powerful and poignant that when someone is ordained in the Church of England they are given a Bible. The person receiving it is encouraged to see that the Bible is given as a sign of authority as well as the opportunity of building up God's people by teaching the truth. At the end of his life and at the end of this letter, Paul writes to Timothy in v1 "*I give you this charge*". This is very much his last will and testament not only to Timothy but also to us.

After the teaching of chapter 3 we are surely not surprised that he now issues a charge to the next generation with the poignant but powerful phrase "*preach the word*" (v2). Notice also that Paul does not pass on to them signs and wonders, no it is to preach and to teach the word of God which is of primary importance for the life of the Church and for those who lead it. Paul's great concern is that the Gospel will be passed on to the next generation. For him, priorities are everything. The charge is given in the presence of God and his son Jesus Christ. Timothy has been told that he must not only follow it, guard it and learn it, he must also teach it to others and now he is also being urged to preach it! The world around us will see preaching as being little short of something stupid! However, we who are looking to and trusting in Christ know that it is both God's truth and also God's way. Surely, these important words leave us in no doubt at all as to the importance of what Paul is declaring.

Until Jesus Christ comes again, the priority of the Church must always be the teaching of the word of God and for this work to be done it will mean hard work, perseverance and a gracious and loving spirit. Just as I was reminded of the days when I used to worship at All Souls that those who commit themselves to Christ are turning against the tide of the world, so we need to recognise that those who preach the word of God are treated with hostility

and are rejected by the society to whom they preach. It is amazing to think that many regard the Bible as a myth rather than taking it seriously (vv3-4). As we look around our world today, we see nothing less than a famine of the word of God in our schools, colleges and culture. Sadly this famine has also come into the life of the Church. It is often neglected even in Church services, major conventions and teaching weeks. Sadly in too many places, Christians open the Bible but then do not teach it. We read the Bible yet we fail to understand and apply it. We often see our leaders being diverted away from being Bible students to being jacks of all trades to a watching world. In v5, Paul reminds Timothy "*keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry*". Paul stresses the importance of being self-controlled and wide awake. The Church and its leaders need once again to take hold of the priorities that Paul is outlining to Timothy. Do not be enticed by the speculations of the false teachers or seduced by the rich wine of worship that does not have Bible teaching at its centre. Paul reminds us that the outreach of the Gospel must always be at the top of our personal and Church agenda. If we do not make evangelism a top priority we are hardly standing in apostolic shoes.

This section comes to a conclusion with Paul's final testimony (v6). In Philippians 2:17 Paul wrote "*but even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice . . .*" Here in 2 Timothy he says "*for I am already being poured out like a drink offering . . .*". The drink offering is poured on the lamb of sacrifice just before it is burned on the altar (Numbers 28:24). There is a comparison and a contrast here. Paul sees his own life as being poured out. When he wrote his letter to Philippi, he was in prison for the first time and he was expecting to be released and to revisit the city (Philippians 2:24). This time, the case is different. He sees his life drawing to a close and this will be his final imprisonment in Rome. In a sense he is aware that his days are numbered. Paul is giving us something of a personal confession. He is reminding us of his departure. The hard day's work is now over and he is heading for his rest.

In v7 we read that Paul's confidence lies in his faith in Jesus Christ and this is surely a prayer that we should be able to echo in

our own hearts if we are faithful to the end. "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith*". Paul has fought the good fight and has spread the Gospel and its pure message of salvation. He neither wandered from the track nor took a short cut. He completed the work God gave him, his race is over and his prize is certain (v8). The exhortations given to Timothy have been fulfilled within his own life (2:3-6).

As we read these words it reminds us of Jesus: Jesus ran the race before Paul, he endured the cross and despised the shame. Likewise Paul has done everything within his power to encourage Timothy - and you and me - to run the race in just the same way.

## Questions for Study 5

This last chapter of Paul's letter has the marks of urgency. The race is almost over.

Q1. What kind of ministry does Paul encourage Timothy to fulfil? (vv1-5) What is Paul's main priority for Timothy? (1 Timothy 4:6,7,11-16; 2 Timothy 1:13,14; 2:2, 14-16)

Q2. What subjects did Timothy have to concentrate on in his preaching and teaching role (vv2-4)? What subjects do you think are particularly needed for our own church?

Q3. Sum up the chief aspects of the false teaching that Timothy had to challenge (vv3-5). What false ideas circulate today? In what ways should we be equipped to deal with them (2 Timothy 3:16,17)?

Q4. What do you think for Timothy was the toughest part of his assignment in v5? In what ways can our church fulfil its task for evangelism? As individual members of the church, what are we most capable of doing in evangelistic outreach?

Q5. Vv6-8 show Timothy how Paul has '*discharged all the duties of his ministry*' (v5). How would these verses be an encouragement to Timothy? What personal encouragement do you gain from them?

## Study 6: Friends and Enemies 2 Timothy 4:9-22

### Introduction

Once more we are in the prison cell with Paul. Chains hold him as he faces martyrdom. His death is imminent because he sought to proclaim the Good News of Christ in the Roman Empire. In this letter, he has poured out his last will and testament to Timothy, urging and inspiring him and the Church of God as he sums up the characteristics of what the heart of ministry is all about. Use these final verses to reflect how you can take up Paul's challenge. See it also as a guide how to live and direct God's people.

### Personal remarks

In vv9-15 and again in vv19-21, Paul is concerned about very practical matters. He names his friends and colleagues as well as those who opposed him. He sends greetings and continues to encourage Timothy to come and see him soon, if that were possible. It is all very real because these are the emotions of a person who is facing his death. There is no sense of triumphalism within Paul's words, but rather a heart which is focussed on the God who loves him and sustains him.

In vv10-12, Paul explains the urgency behind his request to see Timothy. It looks as if Paul has been left almost alone. Demas, his trusted associate, has left him. How painful that experience must have been for Paul at this stage of his life and ministry! Demas has been mentioned before as a fellow worker (Colossians 4:14, Philemon 24). It is a sad comment Demas' life that he had deserted Paul because he loved the world (Romans 12:1,2) It seems as if he was not willing to pay the price of persecution and suffering that Paul himself was only too willing and ready to pay for the sake of the Gospel. We are told that two others in Rome have left Paul; the Bible is silent over their reasons for going. It appears that the work that Paul had given Titus to do in Crete was

complete and so Titus had come to join Paul in Rome. In v11 we learn that Luke is with him. It is likely that Luke was now acting as the Apostle's secretary. Could it be that Luke the physician stayed as Paul's health began to fail?

### People who oppose and God who supports

Vv 14-15 tell us about Alexander the metal worker who did Paul great harm. He may have been responsible for Paul's arrest and imprisonment as he strongly opposed the Gospel and the work of the Apostle. In v16, Paul is put under pressure and feels isolated, as he has to make a case for his own defence. It is reassuring to know in v17 that he was not completely alone: "*the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength*". Our God works in an amazing way so that, as Paul stood in the Gentile court, God himself spoke through him so that they all heard the Gospel. This section closes in v18 with "*The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack*". This is a link back to the Lord's Prayer where we are told as we pray to our Heavenly Father, that he will deliver us from the evil one. Knowing that God is the one who delivers him, Paul ends with a spontaneous moment of praise as he seeks to bring glory to God.

The letter closes with Paul's farewell. Priscilla and Aquilla (v19) featured greatly in Paul's life. Like him, they were tentmakers (Acts 18:2-3). Winter is around the corner (v21). Clearly Paul was cold and damp, because he had asked for a cloak (v13). He sends final greetings from four members of the Church in Rome and concludes with a lovely prayer, desiring that "*The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you*". He prepares to leave the world as he lived, with a humble faith. His ultimate destination is absolutely certain (v18) whatever the circumstances of his departure may be. While he remains on earth, he seeks continually to proclaim the Gospel and to hold on to and to hold out the faith. We too can only live in the right way in this world if we keep our eye the heavenly horizon to which we are heading.

The main thrust of our studies is that we should commit and re-commit ourselves afresh to the Lord during the one life that he has given us.

## Questions for Study 6

Our studies conclude with Paul taking stock of the work and ministry that he has been given by God and to which he is passing on into the care of Timothy.

Q1. Why do you think Paul required Timothy to come to him as soon as possible? (vv9, 21) Remember the deep affection Paul had for him (1 Corinthians 4:17; Philippians 2:19-22 and 2 Timothy 1:2,4).

Q2 How is Demas a warning to us? (Recall his background: Colossians 4:14; Philemon 24). The Apostle Paul was not vindictive (v14-15). Why is it necessary sometimes to identify troublemakers?

Q3. How would this testimony have encouraged Timothy in his relationship with Paul? The Lord's help is always assured, no matter how strong the opposition (16-18). Paul proved Jesus' promise true (Matthew 10:16-20).

Q4. The pressure of Paul's personal situation did not eliminate his concern for and interest in other people (v19-22). What would have helped him maintain this balance? What example would Jesus have been to him? (John 17).

Q5. How would you summon up the message of 2 Timothy firstly to yourself as a Christian at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and secondly to the local church today? What are the lessons that we need to learn from this little book?