

A Warning and a Blessing

2 Timothy 1, verses 15-18. Let us listen attentively to the Word of God, verses 15 and following.

This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Philigulus and Hermogenes. The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain. But when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very zealously and found me. The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that day. And you know very well how many ways he ministered to me at Ephesus.

Let us pray. In these words, God, may we see and learn from this contrast of those who had abandoned the man in his time of need, and on the other hand, God, the one family and the one man in particular who was faithful to be there to support this man, this man of God, this apostle. And Lord, to learn it as a lesson for ourselves, to relearn it, to be encouraged, in fact, to continue on to show care and mercy for one another as this man did. Our God and Savior, and to do it in the name of our Lord and Savior as surely he did as well. We ask that your blessings be upon us in this regard. Amen.

So, in these few verses, Paul brings to Timothy's mind some past happenings, such things that were wrong and hurtful, of Paul, but also of good things. The love of saints, namely one man that Paul highlights in his household for commendation before the whole world even 2,000 years later. We all know, we read about this man, it's all we know about him, but it's enough.

It is in texts like this easy to pass over because there's really no doctrinal matter being expounded as Paul typically does. that we get a glimpse into the hardship and the joys of the apostles. And in fact, it is true for all ministers, as Timothy also had joys and hardships in his ministry.

But what I want to focus on here in particular is Paul's willingness to publicly write about such things, and what we can learn from an implicit warning, which is the first point, about abandoning somebody or people in their time of need, and the explicit blessing upon those who would help instead.

Paul's Implicit Warning

So Paul's implicit warning here, verse 15, where Paul is all alone. This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me. The implication being he's all alone. He's left to his own

devices. He's reminding the young pastor, perhaps it would be easy to see if we continue reading on from verse 13 and 14, we may think in verse 15, he's continuing here to give an example of what it means to not hold fast the pattern of sound words.

Verse 13, where he says instead, hold fast the pattern of sound words, which you have heard from me. Verse 14, that good things which is committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit. Don't lose them. And it looks like in verse 15, some people perhaps lost them. They weren't holding on to this truth. But the wording in verse 15 is not that strong. It's not apostasy here. And so Paul, in other words, has moved on to a new topic in verse 15. It is not tied to verses 13 and 14, although it may look like that.

This you know, he writes, that all those in Asia have turned away from me. The turning away from Paul, not turning away from Christ, that's the first thing to note. And the word turning away is not a strong word that he could have used otherwise to describe apostasy. As one commentator points out, turned away for the verb does not strictly import more than to stand aloof. when they should have showed friendship, they ignored him. Even this was bad enough and betrayed a culpable lack of sympathy with one who had done much for them." And I think that's exactly what is going on here. He doesn't explain explicitly what the problem is other than he's left alone and they're not there with him.

What does that mean, they're not there with him? What does that mean that all of Asia has turned away from me, that is from Paul? I think we get an idea from verse 16 and 17, the contrast. So, they didn't do too hot, verse 15, Asia, it's not looking good. But here in verse 16, we read that he would pray to the Holy Spirit that he would grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus.

For he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. So there's an implicit contrast here. On the one hand, all of Asia, we'll talk a little bit about that in a bit. have left him. Here, one family has not. And so that contrast seems to suggest that Asia was embarrassed of him being in chains, the opposite of this household that was not ashamed of his chains. For Paul was under imprisonment for preaching the gospel, as you recall. And he's on his way to Rome.

No refreshment, for they refreshed me. In fact, verse 17, when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very zealously and found me. He put a lot of effort into taking care of me, of seeking me out. And I tell you, it was a lot of work back then because they didn't have Google Maps. They didn't have a map on the road saying, go left, go right to Paul's imprisonment. They didn't have a mall indicator saying, hey, this is the way and this is what's going on. No, he has to work it out somehow. And he did it with much zeal.

Well, I'll just be grudging. I guess I've got to help this apostle. He's always going to be a problem. No, he did it with zeal. He was loving and desirous to do good to one of the apostles. Apparently, they knew each other. Paul, of course, had established these churches. So he's probably one of the founding members, I would suspect, at Ephesus. and had the resources. He has the money to travel and to go all the way there, probably to Rome there, and to seek him out. And so the Asian Christians did not. They did everything the opposite, I suspect. And that's why you have this implied contrast here.

Leaving him without any support, they didn't bother visiting him. Now I'll remind you that the prison system back then was different than ours today. Not only is it worse in terms of sanitary, animals and remains and feces and whatever else going on there, but they didn't feed them. He had to have family members or friends bring supplies and foods to him. And so when this man is seeking him out, when he arrives in Rome, if Paul was indeed in a prison, he probably brought food.

Because he may have been under house arrest and not in prison per se, but the guards are there certainly with him. He's in chains, he talks about. So whatever the case is, I'm sure he brought more than just his own person. He's there to support him in his time of need. Whatever that support looks like, it probably involves something material, like I said, food, clothing, his cloak. He mentions it elsewhere. You brought my cloak and my scrolls. Someone else did this.

In other words, this friendship that he showed was not just talk. It was concrete. It was done through actions. And he showed effort in his friendship with Paul. And so this, again, I'm pointing out to show the opposite of what the Asian Christians did or did not in this case. They were not showing. Maybe they talked a lot about friendship. They certainly weren't showing it by their actions. They were aloof and far from him, probably even embarrassed. Who wants to be known to be friends with a criminal? Even today, it's kind of embarrassing. I got a family member who got caught by the police again. That's probably what's going through their mind.

But, of course, this is all different, completely different. This is a man of God who is simply preaching the truth. And he's being persecuted for that. And I think what's going on then, that's why I call this here, this first point, Paul's implicit warning, or I could have said, or written down, implicit reprimand to the Church of Asia. It's certainly not a commendation, is it? It's a bad thing to be noted as those who left him for dry, left him to hang out for dry, as we say.

Then, because it is implicit, it's not explicit. So there's a time and place, in other words, to be implicit and not to be hitting people over the head. He's not like, I condemn you. What's your problem? What's going on here? Just a simple statement of fact. These people left me. They left

me hanging for dry. But he spends a lot more time commending and praising this other man and his household.

Now he says, all Asia, in verse 15, this you know. Again, Timothy's aware of what's going on. He might have been involved in some of the support, perhaps. That all those in Asia have turned away from me. Now Asia here is not our Asia. It's not China and India and all that, the Asian continent, we call it. But the name of a Roman province on the western side of modern Turkey, of what we would call modern Turkey today, the western side. So it's across the Asian Sea there, remember, your geography, from Greece, the other side of Greece and Turkey on the west side. Ephesus is the main city there. It's the main city of that province. Ephesus was a major city.

Now, what does he say here? He says, all Asia. And I would like to submit to you the way he's writing here or probably talking as well. He may be writing, talking to his secretary. He does that sometimes. We all do the same thing. We use the word all not to mean every individual person, but a majority or super majority or enough of a quantity to highlight the point that this is serious stuff. I'm left hanging. I'm in prison. I'm in chains and you're not here helping me. It's a way to emphasize a point. And it's OK when everyone's on the same wavelength, of course, and understand Paul's not saying every individual person, but rather enough of them. And we know that there are exceptions, because he even lists one there in verse 16. So contextually, it's easy to argue that all doesn't mean all here. It just means a whole bunch, and it's really embarrassing for them and hard on Paul. Or it ought to be embarrassing for them,

Furthermore, as I finish verse 15, he doesn't just say all, he names names. I find this interesting as well. He's done this before in 1 Timothy. They turned away from me. Among, so he wants to highlight two particular men that have done this to their shame, Phygellus and Hermogenes. The only time that they are mentioned in the Bible is here. We don't know who they are, but that they were named suggests that they were greatly involved and standing aloof. They were probably leaders in the church, either officers or men of influence otherwise. who maybe riled up the rest of them to say, we don't want to hang out with Paul. Trust us. They said, OK. Perhaps the ringleaders. Whatever the case may be, there is a time to name names. and public issues. Depends, of course, on the seriousness of the issue. Depends upon the influence of the men involved, that they're highlighted and set apart suggests they had a lot of influence. And doubly so, if they were church officers or respected laymen, they would have even more influence.

That their deed of leaving a man of God out in the cold to be announced was not wrong, but actually proper. Again, I think it's an implied reprimand, to bring embarrassment upon them, that others would see that they left this godly man, Paul, in the lurch, and to warn Christians

against such heartlessness. There's a time and place to do that. There's a time and place in public debates, of course, to name names. And trials don't need to be done.

This is an interesting, I've touched upon this point before with respect to speaking and what you say in public as church officers in particular, that not everything has to turn into a trial. Have your debates. You can name names. You can say strong things. But then you just leave it alone. You're done with it. And now it's up to the rest of y'all, what you read, who you agree with, and who you think ought to be embarrassed. It doesn't always have to go to trials, what I'm saying. Why always turn it to a trial? It's just because your feelings are hurt.

So I think that's what Paul does a number of times. Not every disagreement, in other words, should go to the church courts. This is clearly a disagreement. Paul is aggrieved. This is bad stuff. The hardship of preaching I want to highlight here then, the negation of it of course on the negative side, that preachers can have hardships as Paul does, difficulties, and people leaving them in the lurch when they need support.

Paul was falsely charged with causing a public scene in particular when he did nothing of the kind. If you recall in Acts, they beat him until they found out he was a citizen. You always beat citizens? They're like, oh no, whoa, this is not good. They could get beaten for beating citizens at the time, right? And so, such men, therefore, need encouragement. And he waited in the jail for a long time. And this time, on his way to Rome here, this is his last letter, we believe. We don't know what happens to him, to his appeal, because he appealed to Caesar, like appealing to the Supreme Court.

Although this day and age we find ourselves in, by God's grace we are blessed with freedom of speech, pastors still get harassed or threatened. You can find some of that online. Videos of these things, I've seen them over the years. Such men of course would need encouragement and prayer if you know them in particular. Often, unfortunately, they're just men we don't really know. You can see all kinds of things. It's one of the interesting things with the global world. And by that, I mean access by the internet and the news.

We can find out about all kinds of people. We really don't know them. We really don't know the circumstances, just whatever the news tells us. And so the best we can do in those cases is just stop and give a little prayer, and we're done. We can't really pursue it. We have other things we have to take care of right here and now. But that's something you can at least do. By God's grace, most of us pastors in America just simply get ignored or they're laughing at us. But sometimes it gets worse and they need your support.

Paul's Explicit Blessing

The second point here I want to end with, Paul's explicit blessing, that's most of the verses here. Verses 16 through 18. And he prays to the Lord to grant mercy upon this household because they had refreshed him and they were not afraid of his chains and they even went to Rome and they sought him out zealously. To support him, again, probably to bring actual physical material support as well as his own presence and friendship.

Paul's prayer here is interesting. It's a prayer for the household of Onesiphorus. Right? The household, not just for the man. He continues on to say, for he refreshed me, and he was not ashamed. He arrived in Rome. He sought me out. Now, it could be it was just merely and only him. It's what it looks like on the surface, and sure, why not? But why bless the household? Maybe servants were with him and assisted him. If he's got money, which he probably does, he would have servants, and the servants would carry whatever needs to be carried. So Paul's also asking a blessing upon them.

But it's the entire household as well, the children, the wife, because they're supporting the husband who left them. Maybe they all went together, but it doesn't sound like it. It sounds just like simply him. The good that you do as a parent in your household, especially the husbands, but not only them, can affect the entirety of the family for good. And that's what's being done here. He's not looking at it as a single act, but a group effort. And that's often the case, unless, of course, you're single. What you do in supporting somebody in the ministry is pretty much you and your household, which is just you. But a couple, he would probably pray for the wife as well. And a family, pray for the children. He wants a blessing upon all of them.

And God's goodness is like that. It's not just upon individuals, but upon those associated with the individual. Those rooted in biology and in blood, he wants the blessing upon all of them. And those, of course, under the household, such as servants, who are not related by blood, but are part of the household. God's mercies extend to them as well, and that's what his prayer is.

And that makes sense from a Presbyterian perspective, because we believe in households, not just individuals, but individuals in community. The first community you start out with is what? Your family. That's where you start. That's where you learn leadership. Your parents are leading you. That's where you learn submission. You're supposed to submit as a child. You grow up. They teach you the ways of the world. And so it makes sense to have these kind of blessings.

And our laws are reflected that way as well. Whatever the parents do, if they do something bad, the kids feel the effect of it financially. Or in jail, in the case of parents being in jail, now the kids are separated. Oh, no. What happened to the poor kids? Good or bad, it affects the family whatever the parents do. In this case, it's a good thing. We ought to follow such kind of a

blessing as well for ourselves that we, too, would pray for blessings not upon the individual, but those who supported the individual as well, which is often the family.

Now, he's refreshed. He uses this generic word. He often refreshed me. It was not a shame to my chains, of my chain, excuse me. The word refresh isn't very explicit, just very vague. Perhaps he just means not being embarrassed on top of whatever else he brought for support, as I pointed out, material aid and the like. I think it's a summary idea of everything good that he did for him.

Being there with him, perhaps praying with him, talking to him, encouraging him, clearly visiting him, for he sought me out zealously and found me in Rome. And this is a good thing. We ought to be refreshing one another with whatever we have to bring assistance and concrete friendship to those in need. And not just pastors.

I've already, I think, slid into this and pointed out right now that it's not just pastors. Anybody else, especially Christians who need such assistance. He was not embarrassed. He was willing to take a public shame of befriending Paul the Apostle. And of course we would all today think that's obvious. Wouldn't we want Paul as our pastor? Clearly it wasn't the case back then. Showing again how human they were. That is the sins they struggle with. They're like us.

And in the midst of it, in their perspective, Paul wasn't necessarily the greatest of all of them. As we saw in 1 Corinthians, a lot of people like Peter. Peter baptized me. Aren't I special? So they had all this ebb and flow of relationships of who they thought was wonderful and who they attached themselves to, kind of like what we do today. And so although Paul stands out for us, back then he didn't stand out as much. It's quite interesting from that perspective.

And he was an enemy of the state in that sense, and he was willing to stand with them. In other words, As Paul says in Romans, I am not ashamed of the gospel. Here, too, this household, this man, Onesiphorus, is basically saying, I'm not ashamed of the gospel preached by this man. I'm not ashamed of the man either, because this is a wonderful message that he has, and I'm going to stand with him, I'm going to support him. And we too should have a similar zeal for the truth and for the ministers who preach the truth to stand with them.

And he was seeking out Paul, again, showing concrete love and care and consideration for ourselves today. Love and compassion, of course, must involve more than words. We have friends, maybe not even close friends, just someone at church who's at the hospital, and we go visit them. Now, we have a special ability to pull this off, because the hospital's next door sometimes. We've had people just walk across the street. Do it. Makes it easy. I know it's harder throughout the week, because you live further away. And I've mentioned this before, it's

hard to maintain fellowship when we're scattered across the city. It's not just us, many churches struggle with this.

But do what you can before God in your conscience. If you can't visit, you can call, you can send a letter. We are called, as you recall in Galatians 6, to bear one another's burdens. And this is one of the ways in which we do it. People in need. We ought to show mercy to them. That's what they did. They showed mercy. On the other hand, most of those people in the churches of Asia did not. They weren't interested. It'd be like having one of our, it's really amazing, one of our missionaries in Africa under trial in the Sudan government or wherever we have missionaries right now. And we're like, yeah, you're on your own, buddy. Wow. That's a church, that's a bunch of Christians in Asia doing this, apparently in Ephesus. But God still had his people among them, that is those whom he worked and showed compassion and love as this household.

In doing good, being alert of the needs of the people of God and our church, or our church's plural, and our presbytery, or even outside our presbytery, as I pointed out in Sunday School class, that we are in communion with one another, even outside the church structure, if we indeed have the same confession and the same baptism, and to be there for one another as we can give the gifts.

We should especially be alert and helpful for the church officers and pastors in particular, that when they are under attack, they need our prayers, they need our encouragements, they need our thanks as need be.

By God's grace, Lord has given us, again, freedom of speech, and many of us aren't, I don't want anybody in prison for preaching the gospel of America. I know they got in trouble for other things, but properly speaking, from what I know, it's never been, I preach the gospel, you're out of here. But something like that perhaps happened, because America is big. Even so, God has blessed us, and we ought to bless one another. Right?

In Matthew 5, we read in the Sermon on the Mount, where Christ goes through the Beatitudes and highlights what was missing amongst the Jews, especially their leadership. He wasn't bringing a new ethics to the church, as though God had two ethics, one in the Old Testament, one in the New Testament. They, too, were supposed to be merciful in the Old Testament. And you see examples of that, in fact, in the books of Samuel and Kings that I've gone through on Wednesday night.

No, rather he's highlighting what has been lost and what has been hidden by the lies of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. And one of those beatitudes, one of the blessings, blessed be the merciful God, that is Jesus Christ tells us. And so Paul uses this kind of blessing, I think, that

basis. The Lord grant mercy. That's a blessing. The Lord grant him, verse 18, that he may find mercy from the Lord on that day. but the merciful shall be given mercy.

We should encourage mercy for one another in compassion. Pray for blessings upon those who have been merciful as well, and not forget them in our prayers. Our blessings go beyond and ought to go beyond prayer, of course, that we bless those who bless, being merciful to them as well. And of course, even being merciful to those who don't deserve mercy, depending on the context. It's an importance, in other words.

It's important in the Christian church and our communion with one another as believers in Christ to help one another. Mercy, again, is not just an abstraction. It's just words. But what are we doing in the concrete with our hands and with our feet? It is a gift of God, first from Christ to us. And so we ought to turn around and give that mercy and grace to one another.

Christ gives that parable, the man in debt, He owed a lot of money, like a lifetime's worth. And his friend didn't give him money, and he took him to the torturers, and he wanted that money from him. And his master's like, why did you treat him that way? I had mercy on you, you couldn't have mercy on someone else? What's your problem? Keep that in mind. If you struggle with this, I think by God's grace, many of us do not. Don't hide your gift. I know you may feel like I'm not rich, I don't have a lot of money, I can't do a lot of mercy, works of mercy for God's people. You can do something, just again, simple prayer, a word of encouragement, being aware of what's going on, a little time maybe, depending on what is needed.

And so that means by helping and supporting one another, it doesn't always have to be serious, jail time. If it's not jail time, I guess I'm not gonna do anything. No, just all kinds of things in life, you're out of work, Your car got broken into. You're discouraged this week. Little things and big things. Being merciful is simply coming and assisting, even if it's not material, just a word of encouragement is a merciful act at times.

And of course it depends upon our relationship, to what extent and how often we exercise our gifts of mercy and our abilities to help, whether financial or spiritual, to those close to us, above all, our own church family and the like, of course, are our focus. But not only you can forget other things when you should not, forget other people when you should not, But you're going to do more with them, more with your family, more with your friends, more acts of mercy for the church. But don't forget others.

And as pressing needs, of course, come upon us, of course, a good example of that is emergencies, earthquakes, and things like that, you're going to help. You're going to do what you can, especially if you're impacted as well, to be supportive of those in need. But doubly so

for Christians, for that is the focus here in 2 Timothy, the apostle Paul doubly so for religious persecution.

Across the world, again, we don't have much information. We don't have a lot of contacts in these places. You hear things from China and the like. I try to get verifications from my contacts in China, right? And they're like, we don't really know. Sometimes it's fake. Sometimes we just aren't sure exactly what's going on. So you just pray the best you can.

What does come to mind, though, are men who are not pastors, Christian young women, Christian women who had, I think it was a flower industry or photography out in Seattle a long time ago, R. Christian Baker here in Littleton or Lakewood, I always forget the name of the city. They are being harassed by the government, by the state. for wanting to do a Christian thing. They, too, need encouragement.

His case, my family and I went down to his bakery. Of course, naively, we're like, oh, maybe we can see him. And the workers are there like, nobody can see him because it's dangerous. And I was like, OK, that makes sense. What can we do? We can sign this greeting book. OK, we signed the greeting book. We're praying for you. Seems kind of a letdown for us, but you do what you can. That's the point. for those in need, especially Christians.

Any small gesture can help. Christian friendship and mercy is a precious thing, brothers and sisters. Look to these two examples. One negative, what you shouldn't do, being aloof and afar and whatever, buddy, you're on your own, when a man is truly in need. And of course, on the flip side, a good example of helping and even being zealous in our help for one another, as he was in his household, standing with the man under persecution and encouraging what little he could help by refreshing him, by not being ashamed, by doing whatever I suspect that he needed to do materially or spiritually to be there for the apostle.

We must resist embarrassment at Christians standing for Christ and the truth in the public square. I don't think it's a particular problem for our churches and our circles, but the temptation could be there, especially for those who are timid. And we must reinforce our care for each other, brothers and sisters, as we see the times change around us.

We see things perhaps getting ugly in our family, our community, and the like, or worse, or whatever the case is. Friendship is important here, merciful friendship, being helpful in our time of difficulty, a concrete friendliness that works in actions as well as words, whether big or small, should always be useful for the good of the saints as we are able.

Let us be merciful, brothers and sisters, asking for wisdom to see what can be done and humility to recognize sometimes we can't do as much as we would like. but in all things to help

one another, for we are all one in Christ, blessed by him, and we should therefore bless and be merciful to one another.

Let us pray, Gracious God above, may your mercies flow through us, and may we be an example of Christ Jesus and his compassion, his mercy, and his care for us, Lord. especially for the soul, as we pray for one another and give words of encouragement, but also for the bodily concerns, as you have given us the office of deacon to deal with public funds, and we have our own private funds in which we can help one another beyond that.

Our Lord and Savior, give us the wisdom, give us the encouragement, give us, we pray, the love for one another to do and follow the example of the household of Onesiphorus. By Christ we pray, amen.