

# Paul's dear son

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] We're starting a new sermon series this evening. We're considering Paul's second letter to Timothy. We looked at his first letter a couple of years ago and found a blueprint for church life.

Paul's advice to Timothy so that he will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth, and to equip him to refute the false teachers there in Ephesus.

So that was letter one. And now a few years down the line, Paul is writing to Timothy again. And to help us to get a handle on the book, well, we've read the whole thing through, but to think through some of the themes, some of the purposes for which Paul writes it, we've seen a few of these videos for some of the other books we've looked at.

We'll watch this one now, and hopefully it'll help us to get a handle on what to expect over the coming weeks. Okay. Well, there's a quick summary of the book as a whole.

Let's spend a few minutes on the first five verses of the letter together this evening, which, as we'll see, they introduce some of those themes they're going to run their way through.

[ 1 : 1 4 ] And I want to consider three things from these verses. Firstly, we'll consider the author, second, the recipient, and then thirdly, the thanksgiving. So the author.

Sometimes it's worth spending a bit of time refuting some of the more liberal approaches to God's word that would, for instance, refuse to take the first word of this letter at its word, and academics will debate at great length whether Paul really wrote it or not.

Sometimes it's worth engaging so that we can be confident in God's word and continue to take it seriously and hold our heads high when we're treated as ridiculous. Sometimes it's worthwhile, but tonight I'm just not interested, especially because the arguments for why we treat Paul as the author of this second letter are the same as the arguments for the first letter to Timothy.

So you can go and listen to the recording if you want that, and it's on the website and everything.

So we're taking that as read. But I do want to discuss the author in two respects.

Firstly, we're going to consider Paul's situation as he writes. It's widely agreed, as you saw in the video there, it's widely agreed that of Paul's letters that are preserved for us in our Bibles, this is the one that he wrote last.

[ 2 : 2 8 ] This is Paul at the end of his life, and Paul is concerned about succession planning. Most of you know I'm an Apple fan, and because I'm a geek, I pay some attention to the company as a whole, not just to the gadget that I'm going to buy next.

And many of you will maybe remember Steve Jobs, CEO from 1997 to 2011, and he died just a few months after he resigned as CEO. Cancer, if I remember rightly.

And at the time, there was considerable angst amongst the press as to how the company was going to survive without Steve Jobs at the helm. But to those of us who'd been paying attention, I think we were rather less worried because we'd had our eye for a while on this guy waiting in the wings.

Tim Cook, who had been the chief operating officer and long the de facto second-in-command.

Steve Jobs was preparing him to take over, over a period of years.

And so most analysts seem to agree Apple has indeed weathered the storm of Jobs' death and goes from strength to strength. Steve Jobs prepared his successor.

[ 3 : 3 6 ] He knew he was coming to the end of his life, and he made provision for it. That is exactly what Paul is doing here as he writes this letter. He's worried about how things will continue after he dies.

He's getting old, but even more pressingly, he's back in prison, and this time he does not expect to be released. Chapter 4, I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near.

I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Paul is confident as he faces death, but he is also pragmatic in making provision for the future. It's his final chapter, if you like, but he knows it must not be the final chapter for the gospel.

He knows some of the significance of his ministry. He knows that he was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles. So who will take up that role once he's gone? Who will keep the church on the right track?

[ 4 : 45 ] Who will guard the gospel? Well, just as Joshua followed on after Moses, just as Solomon came after David, and Elisha followed after Elijah, well, now Timothy must follow on in Paul's footsteps, because God's work is not done.

Timothy may well still be comparatively young, but he needs to shoulder the burden, and so Paul is getting him ready for it. So this is Paul coming to the end of his life, preparing his successor.

Second thing to notice about Paul in the rest of verse 1. Paul refers to himself here as an apostle, just the same as he does in his other letters.

And a lot of commentators find it strange that in this most personal of letters that Paul refers to himself in such terms. I mean, Timothy hardly needs to be reminded that Paul is an apostle.

He knows Paul very well. But there are a few good reasons, I think, why he would still do this.

Firstly, it could almost be habitual that this is just him kind of starting a letter as he always does.

[ 5 : 52 ] That might be part of it, but I think there are a couple of other things that are more significant. While it's true, yes, this is the most personal of Paul's letters, that's not the same as saying that it is idle chit-chat.

This isn't a holiday postcard that he's writing, is it? This is an instruction from the apostle Paul. He still has all the authority of his apostleship. And what he's going to call Timothy to do is not straightforward, is not easy.

Timothy's being challenged to persevere, to face up to suffering, to go and to continue to address false teaching. And Paul charging him to do this, this isn't on the basis of personal friendship.

This is on the basis of Paul's authority as an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. When I write an email, assuming that I remember to send it from the right email address, it says at the bottom, Benjamin Wilkes, minister, covenant church, new mills.

Normally, I don't worry too much whether that's there or not, which account I'm sending it from. It doesn't matter hugely whether the email that I sent to Duncan with a notice to go in the sheet has that at the bottom or not.

[ 7 : 04 ] It doesn't matter a huge amount. But every now and then, every now and then, I've written an email to one of the elders that, say, offers a comment on a theological question or some advice on how to approach a pastoral situation.

We don't often do this by email. Mostly we discuss these things in person. But every now and then, writing an email like that, well, I make sure it's got that signature on the bottom. And when I write an email with a recommendation for the Prospectary Strategy Committee and so on, I make sure that that is there.

Some emails are that little bit more official, even if they do also still say, I hope that our family are all keeping well and don't forget we're expecting you for lunch on Sunday. Because I have an official role as well as being an individual.

And sometimes it's important to make sure that that kind of corresponds. Well, for Paul, for Paul you can multiply that 10,000 times over.

Because to be an apostle is not just to offer advice. It's not just to have some thoughts on how the Bible perhaps pertains to this situation. To be an apostle means Paul has the authority to declare doctrine.

[ 8 : 16 ] To lay down the fundamental truths that you and I are still affirming today. He has the right to call Timothy to action and expect to be obeyed. So yes, Paul is writing to his friend, to his protege.

But he's doing it as an apostle, not just as a man. And when the apostle Paul speaks, Timothy is wise to listen and so are you and I. Third reason for referring to himself as an apostle.

Here in this epistle, Paul draws quite a few parallels between himself and Timothy. And we'll look at one in the following verses. And given these parallels that he draws, given that in this letter he

delegates to Timothy, he instructs him to do things.

And given that, as we'll see, Timothy is not the only person listening to this letter. Given all of that, then the third reason for Paul to refer to his apostleship is that some of the authority that is Paul's as an apostle, some of it kind of transfers over to Timothy and authorizes and encourages him in his work in Ephesus.

So there's Paul, the author of the letter, at the end of his life, making authoritative claims and instructions as an apostle. Paul. To Timothy, my dear son.

[ 9 : 37 ] Again, I don't need to say a huge amount about Timothy. Again, you can go listen to the start of the last series if you like, but a couple of brief points. First, as with the first letter, this letter is designed to be overheard.

It isn't for Timothy alone, but rather, what Paul writes should itself serve to instruct and to correct others in the congregation in Ephesus. And according to the superintending power of the Holy Spirit, should serve to instruct and to correct you and me as well.

Just like 1 Timothy, the letter ends with a benediction in the plural, grace be with you all. Paul is writing to the church, not just the man, Timothy.

Secondly, my dear son. That's how Timothy is referred to here. It's worth pausing for a moment to reflect on why that is. Paul's not shy in expressing his affection, whether that's for individuals or for whole churches.

Paul cares about people. Paul cares about those whom he has led to the Lord. He cares about the health of the churches that he has started and for that matter, considering Colossians, the churches that he has not started.

[ 10 : 50 ] There's considerable affection in how Paul writes to different people and considerable affection in this address. But that is not all that is involved in referring to him as dear son.

It's a commentator by the name of Philip Towner. He says the term son describes Timothy's relationship to Paul in terms of fictive kinship. With that language, Paul often portrayed himself as a father to those converted through his ministry.

Dear is also certainly a term of approval, affirmation, and intimacy. And when one combines these items, the picture becomes one that involves responsibility as of a child to a father, a disciple to a teacher, and close filial relationship.

The filial obligation and relationship are underlined here as the basis for the exhortations to come. In other words, Paul expects that Timothy is going to obey the instructions that follow in this letter because Timothy is Paul's dear son.

He will obey because he loves Paul and he will obey because sons and daughters, for that matter, properly display their love for their fathers in obedience. So, that's the author and the recipient.

[ 12 : 06 ] Verses 3 to 5, the thanksgiving. Just like the opening two verses, that's who the letter's from and who it's to, similarly, the presence of this thanksgiving section is part of the practice, the normal way of writing letters at the time.

But for Paul, this is not just formality, is it? I don't know about you, but for me, if I'm honest, the level of sincerity in my writing has little, if any, impact on how I sign the letter.

It is still yours sincerely regardless of how sarcastic I have been in the body of the letter. We sometimes just do things because that's what you do. But Paul is not regurgitating a formula here, is he?

Paul makes this his own. But maybe it's not immediately obvious what Paul is saying here. What is it that he is thanking God for? The problem here is that verses three to five is actually one single sentence in Paul's Greek.

English translations consistently break it down into shorter sentences so that you can follow the individual pieces, what on earth is going on here. But the problem in doing that is that you lose the sense of the whole of it.

[ 13 : 18 ] But if you take a step back, then the bones of the sentence is, I thank God because I am reminded of your sincere faith. That fundamentally is what Paul is thanking God for.

It is Timothy's faith. Most of verse three, all of verse four, and the second half of verse five, all of those are kind of adding supplemental information around this core meaning. Paul thanks God for Timothy's faith.

And what I've been wondering about this week, I've been wondering how many of us, how often I, how many of us regularly thank God for faith, whether that's our own faith or the faith of others.

Do you thank God for giving you new birth? Do you thank God that your spouse or your children or your friends have been brought by God to that point of repentance unto life?

I think often we take that for granted, don't we? I think often we act as though it were something that we had achieved or attained or that it was the result of our background or a matter of indifference.

[14:26] But Paul says he thanks God daily for Timothy's faith. And folks, if we have, if we have any empathy for our friends here in this congregation who cannot pray thanking God for the faith of those whom they hold dear, if we are sympathetic to them in that pain, then our sympathy there involves, amongst other things, gratitude to God for the faith of our own loved ones, treating it as a precious gift, not as a right or as a matter of indifference.

Paul thanks God for Timothy's faith. Secondly, here in this Thanksgiving, Paul offers the first of many parallels in this letter between his own life and Timothy's.

Paul notes that he himself serves God with a clear conscience just as his ancestors did. Paul hasn't abandoned his former faith, but rather he's affirming continuity with the true faith of his Jewish ancestors.

In other words, he's saying he hasn't left the Old Testament and hasn't turned to worship and serve another God, but rather that in recognizing Jesus as the promised Messiah, as the one to whom the Old Testament was pointing, that he has indeed continued to serve the God of Abraham.

And for Paul, well, Timothy similarly should continue in one and the same faith. Having been instructed in the Jewish scriptures by his grandmother and his mother since his infancy, he should continue in that same faith.

[16:04] Paul follows in the patriarchs, in the footsteps of the patriarchs of old. Timothy ought to follow in the path of his own ancestors, of his mother and grandmother. And Paul notes in verse 5, the faith he professes is that same faith that his grandmother and his mother have.

So Paul is persuaded that Timothy has this sincere faith and he gives God thanks for it. That is absolutely his primary point here, that he is thankful for that faith and that he has persuaded that that faith exists.

But there's maybe a subtle exhortation here as well that Paul knows or Paul anticipates, if you like, that Timothy will perhaps feel a degree of reluctance, of ambivalence about the task that Paul is going to set out for him in this letter.

Because the call to suffer for the sake of the gospel is not an immediately attractive call, is it? And so maybe here there's just that slight hint that Timothy probably ought to prove that his faith does indeed live on in him.

Finally, on these verses, verse 4, Paul remembers Timothy's tears at their parting. Paul desires that they might be together again in order that he may find joy.

[17:31] here as so often the content of the opening Thanksgiving that Paul writes as so often it prefigures the content of the letter as a whole. And the fundamental purpose of this letter is to ask Timothy to come and see him before he dies.

The point that we note here is this. Friends, it is good to have friends. It is good to be close to people. It's a good thing that being parted from one another results in sadness.

The Christian life is not meant to be lived alone. That is not God's intention. That has never been God's intention. The purpose of this letter fundamentally is to ask Timothy to come and see him before he dies because he wants to be with him.

We're supposed to carry one another's burdens, to point one another to Jesus, to teach one another, to encourage one another. For me, one of the biggest encouragements of my first few months here in New Mills, one of the biggest encouragements was when Ian Hamilton came for the day.

And it was so encouraging to me to see his love and his care and his concern for so many of you who he remembers from so long ago.

[18:52] And it's not just him, is it? So often when I'm booking people to come and preach here, people who've been before are eager to return because they delight to renew their acquaintances with you.

Folks, that should be an encouragement to you that this is a congregation that people enjoy coming to, that people are encouraged by being with you. You should be encouraged by that, especially those of you who've played a role in afternoon hospitality for visiting preachers and so on, but more broadly too, as we live our lives together, as we spend time with one another, as we encourage

those who have come to bring God's word.

Folks, we are encouraging them as they are encouraging us. And that is, to me, very reassuring that we are indeed building those friendships that ought to be part of our normal Christian lives. See, the affection between Paul and Timothy, it moved Paul to write to his dear son. It moved him to long that they be reunited. My prayer is that it will be likewise for us, that our fellowship in the Lord will move us to that kind of depth of affection for one another.

Let's pray. Lord God, thank you for this letter that Paul wrote to Timothy.

[ 20 : 17 ] Thank you that even as we have barely started to dig into it, thank you that already there are both encouragements and challenges for us. Thank you for the affection that Paul had for Timothy and Timothy for Paul.

Lord, may that be a feature of our own lives as well, that we will delight to spend time with one another, not only because it is easy and comfortable, but because we value the experience of being pointed to you.

May that be a part of our lives together, that we would be diligent in our love of you and in calling one another to obedience to your word.

Thank you for the blessing to us of this letter written all those years ago. Enliven us through it, we ask. Call us to faithfulness.

In Jesus' name. Amen.