

2 Timothy 1.15-18 Refreshment of Faithful Friendship

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[0:00] 2 Timothy chapter 1, and a little bit of a reminder of the setting and the context. The setting is that Paul is in his second Roman imprisonment, and it's a time during state-sanctioned persecution.

! Christians are being persecuted. Paul is in harsh Roman prison conditions, and he knows that his time of departure is at hand, and he's awaiting his execution.

And while he's awaiting, he is in harsh conditions. In 2 Timothy 1, we'll start in 7 and read through to 18.

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me, his prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with the holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.

For this reason, I also suffer these things. Nevertheless, I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have committed to him until that day.

[1:41] Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus, that good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus 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.

Lord, we thank you again for this day and for this Lord's Day. We thank you for the means of grace and your purposes, for the means of grace. We pray for your blessing over the preaching of the word, that you would illuminate your word to us, that you would grow us in knowledge of your word, and understanding, and wisdom, and in prudence, that we may grow in faith and obedience by your Spirit's work of grace in us.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Now in verses 15 to 18, we have examples. In these verses, examples are recorded of faithful friendship and action, and that is in contrast to defective friendship and abandonment.

[3:20] So first of all, the failure of abandonment.

Notice in verse 15, we see from the failure of abandonment that Paul experiences alienation and affliction. Notice the turn of events that's occurred and how significant this is.

Before this, it seemed like everybody wanted to hear Paul. Everybody wanted to hear Paul's message. But as soon as that message brought affliction, then nobody wants to hear Paul's message, and nobody wants to be associated with that message or with Paul.

Nobody wanted anything to do with him. And so nobody stood by him. And Paul experienced the sting of abandonment.

Paul experienced the pain of being abandoned, of being deserted. So also, Christ knew of the sting of abandonment.

[4:35] He also was deserted. And he knew, Christ knew that he would be abandoned when he was arrested and despised and rejected. And yet knowing that, he still lovingly served his disciples.

He loved and served his disciples. Here in our text, we see that Paul experiences the sting and the pain of abandonment, of desertion. So from this, remember to choose your friends wisely.

Proverbs 12, 26 says, The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the day of the wicked leads them astray. And with Paul, in this text, we see that many were led astray.

So Paul, being alienated in affliction, gives us examples of abandonment. And 15b says, Among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes.

Two people are mentioned. Their names are written in Scripture. They were likely influential. They were likely ringleaders. People would have known who they were for them to be mentioned.

[5:44] And were likely influential in leading others away, leading them astray. And in so doing, their names are forever recorded in Scripture.

In the Word of God, the infallible Word of God, their names are written down as examples of failure, of abandonment. So what does their turning away demonstrate?

The fact that they turned away, and it's recorded that they turned away, that they abandoned. I want to draw your attention to two texts. The first one is in 1 John, 1 John 2, 19.

It says, They went out from us, but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out that they might be made manifest that none of them were of us.

So when there's no danger, when there's no affliction, perhaps there's opportunity for fame or for benefit, or they see the benefits of the gospel or of Christianity without wanting the gospel.

[6:49] But as soon as the gospel brings affliction and not the benefits that they're hoping for, then it's not the gospel that they're after. So they go out and show and make manifest of who it is that they are.

So who exactly are they? Philippians 3, 17 helps to make that more clear. Brethren, join in following my example and note those who so walk as you have us for a pattern.

For many of whom I have told you often and now tell you even weeping that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their mind on earthly things.

People who are after earthly benefits and earthly glory and not the glory of the gospel, the glory of the cross and the benefits of being in Christ, that is Christ himself.

So in the failure of abandonment, we see Paul is alienated, his alienation in affliction. He gives examples of abandonment.

[7:56] And then we see also the effect, that is the winnowing of affliction. And Christopher Ashe, writing on shame, Christians experiencing shame, he writes, Christian service is often most effective when done through constraint and suffering and sometimes most shallow when accompanied by ease and apparent success.

So in today's day and age, and we read of this 2,000 years ago, but if today's day and age, let's say that the gospel was determined, politically determined, to be hate speech, the gospel message, and that anybody who proclaimed the gospel would be put to death.

What kind of effect do you think this would have on the church? What do you think most churches would look like? Do you think most churches would remain standing? I would imagine that there's probably a lot of mega churches around that would remain standing and they wouldn't even have to change their message and they would still be in compliance because they don't preach the gospel.

They don't preach about sin. They don't preach about God's holiness and justice and about the need for salvation and which is the glorious gospel of salvation in Christ. But should Christianity today come under severe persecution in North America, which churches would be steadfast and which churches would defect?

What would it look like in a seeker-sensitive, pragmatism-driven megachurch where they target the unchurched in order to entertain them?

[9:31] I think we would see, as Christopher Ash mentioned, that Christian service is most effective when done through constraint and suffering. It would certainly be more genuine and sincere.

But seeing the failure of abandonment and in contrast to the failure of abandonment, there is an example of faithfulness in action.

So secondly, faithfulness in action in verse 16. The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain. Now this name, Onesiphorus, it is the only time in all of Scripture that that name is mentioned. But his name is mentioned in Scripture.

His name is forever written in the Word of God, the infallible Word of God as a positive example of faithfulness, of faithful action, of being a faithful friend.

[10 : 37] And you notice that he didn't, well, we can gather from the text, he didn't just wait for the spotlight to come on him in order to rise to the occasion.

It's not like he stood at home practicing his lines in the mirror, waiting for the opportunity in order to run out in the spotlight in the presses there with their parchments and scrolls and quill pens in order to record what he says.

But he didn't wait for the spotlight. It's characteristic of who he was. Notice it says, he often refreshed me. It's something that he often did.

It's not like he did it just once when the right opportunity presented itself so that he could virtue signal and, you know, take a selfie for his virtue signaling. Going to a street corner artist and get him to sketch him out, giving a cup of water to Paul.

Make sure you get his chains in there. Make his chains look bigger than they are. He wasn't virtue signaling. This is who he was. It says, he often refreshed me. And then 18b, it says, and you know very well how many ways he ministered to me in Ephesus.

[11 : 45] This is before his Roman imprisonment. Onesiphorus faithfully ministered to Paul often. That's just who he was. Onesiphorus was just a faithful dude.

And when affliction arose, nothing changed. It wasn't for pretense. It wasn't for self-seeking motives. When there was no danger, he was faithful.

And then in the face of danger, nothing changed. He continued courageously to be a man of action. And it further says, not ashamed of my chain.

When danger arose, when affliction arose, when there was a danger in associating with Paul, who was in chains, Onesiphorus did not defect at the prospect of suffering.

And one of the purposes of public shame and execution was to deter others from following that example and from associating with him.

[12 : 46] But Onesiphorus did not defect at that prospect of suffering, the disgrace of the world's disapproval, come what may. And Proverbs 17, 17 says, a friend loves at all times.

Even when it means the threat of danger, the threat of life, the threat of suffering, disapproval of the world, a friend loves at all times. We also see with Onesiphorus, earnestness of action.

And verse 17, But when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out zealously and found me. Now Paul wouldn't have been easily tracked down.

It's not like today where there'd be a central state penitentiary where you go to it and they look in their computer system and you give the name and they look it up alphabetically and he's from Tarsus, so he's in the T-wing or whatever it might be.

That's not how it was. His imprisonment would not be what we might picture it as being today. His imprisonment would have been hard to track down.

[13 : 53] And Onesiphorus, he sought him out very zealously. He would have had to have worked very hard and likely most people that he would have asked would not want to even talk about it because, well, first of all, everyone abandoned Paul, but also people would not want to be associated with this message, with this following in which is being persecuted.

But in the face of danger by association, Onesiphorus sought out Paul zealously with difficulty and danger and no one else with him. It's not like he had other people with him that they could spur one another on or that they could help share the weight of the task.

But he and he alone, he zealously, diligently, diligently, with intentions of affection, not as a coward, but desiring to find him and face any subsequent consequences of association.

You see the earnestness of action, of his faithfulness. And then we see also the effect of action.

And going back into verse 16, it says, For he often refreshed me.

Now, I briefly mentioned the conditions that he would have been in, not picturing a prison cell today. His conditions would have been very harsh, just awaiting, essentially, to be put to death.

[15 : 17] In other words, where he was imprisoned was not the Martha Stewart suite, but he was in harsh imprisonment conditions. And as a prisoner, he would have been deprived of food.

And he would not have had the necessities to survive. So prisoners in those conditions would depend on family or on friends to provide those things. So he would have depended upon others for survival, but everyone abandoned him when it mattered most, except for Onesiphorus, who zealously sought him out until he located him and he visited him often, for he often refreshed me. Now, in Onesiphorus' refreshing Paul and going to Paul, what exactly did Onesiphorus accomplish? Well, he didn't solve all the world's problems.

He didn't convert all of Rome. He didn't make Paul's afflictions go away. He didn't have all the answers in coming to Paul.

So what did he do? What was so important to put his life on the line, to face the threat of persecution, to work so hard, to zealously and diligently seek Paul out?

[16:34] What did he offer? What did he do that was so refreshing to him? Well, he sought him out. In other words, Onesiphorus cared. He didn't abandon him.

When everybody else did, he didn't leave him alone. He came to him, and this refreshed Paul. This might make you think in Matthew 25, verses 31 to 40.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.

And he will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the king will say to those on his right hand, Come, you blessed of the Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry, and you gave me food. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you took me in. I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me.

[17:40] I was in prison, and you came to me. Then the righteous will answer him, saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and take you in, or naked and clothe you?

Or when did we see you sick, or in prison and come to you? And the king will answer and say to them, Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these, my brethren, you did it to me.

Now, a quick note on verse 18, and how this verse is not to be interpreted. It says, The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that day.

This is not a proof text. This is not grounds for prayers of the dead. This is a name-it-and-claim-it prayers of praying things for, merits to be applied to those who are dead, which is the Roman Catholic text to justify prayers for the dead.

What's going on in verse 18 is, The praiseworthy actions of Onesiphorus elicits this wish tribute of praise, affection, and commendation from a human speaker to human readers.

[18:56] As though if we were to say, God, may the Lord bless you. Or if you're talking to somebody about a ministry, a church, and maybe you hear somebody say, may the Lord bless that ministry.

It's not name-it-and-claim-it. It's not a prayer that that will occur. It's expressing our wishfulness as a human being that this would occur.

So finally, what are some concluding uses that we can take from this text? I want to ask the question, what does providing help look like?

What does helping somebody look like? In other words, what does friendship look like? Sometimes we might have the inclination to think, if somebody is in need of help, if somebody is under affliction, we might be tempted to think that we have to have all the answers in order to be a help to them.

Or that we might have to, you know, be able to explain it, have the answers, and able to go to them.

Or that we have to somehow fix the problem. Remember, Onesiphorus, his name is written in Scripture.

[20:04] His name is forever recorded in the infallible Word of God because of what he did when everyone else didn't. And again, it's not that he solved the world's problems.

It's not that he made Paul's affliction go away. It's not that he had all the answers and coming to Paul to give it to him, to give to him the answers. So what did Onesiphorus do?

He sought him out. Onesiphorus sought Paul out. And there's something unexplainably refreshing about a friend just coming to you in your time of need.

And there's not thinking, not thinking, in coming, not thinking that they have all the answers, but just to be there with you.

So there's something refreshing about a friend just seeking you out, just to be with you, not bringing all the answers, but just being there with you. So there's two extremes that could hinder us from this.

[21:13] The one extreme is don't feel like it's useless to go to a brother because you don't have the answers. We might think, well, I don't have the answers for this affliction, for this problem. I don't know what to tell him, so there'd be no point in me going.

That is one extreme, which would be wrong. Remember, Onesiphorus just sought him out. He cared. He was there to be with him. And that was greatly refreshing to the apostle.

The other extreme is to think that we have all the answers and to explain it all away. So the other extreme is don't think that you should give all the answers. Think of Job. Job's friends, for the first seven days, they sought him out and they sat with him and they didn't open their mouths.

They didn't say a thing. They were just with him. And it says that they were a comfort to him by just being there with him and not saying anything. They were a comfort to him. And after seven days, they started talking and they were no longer a comfort.

They thought that they had all the answers and they were no longer a comfort, but they were a comfort when they were just with him. They just sat with him. The second concluding use is that God is sovereign.

[22:22] God governs all things. God limits all things. God controls all things. When the apostle Paul is in prison awaiting his execution, does that fit under the category of all things?

It does. What about our afflictions? What about our sufferings? What about our sorrows? Does that fall into the category of all things? It does. And God sovereignly governs limits and controls all things.

And the afflictions of believers are not excluded. And God governs our afflictions for our good. We have a tendency of thinking that our good is our temporal, corporeal comfort.

But in the scope of eternity, our good isn't confined to our temporal, corporeal comfort. In fact, this evening, we'll be looking at God's immensity.

And I think that will shed a lot of light to help with that. But rather, God governs our afflictions for our good according to, not our comfort, but according to his fatherly disposition towards his people who are in Christ Jesus according to the covenant of grace.

[23:42] So, there is suffering across the whole world in a broken, sin-cursed world. Every person suffers. Those who are not in Christ, their suffering, suffering comes on account of sin because of the fall.

And those who are not in Christ, it's God's judgment and it's God's punishment for sin. But those who are in Christ are dead to the law in the sense of no longer under judgment of the law and are made anew in Christ in the covenant of grace and under grace.

So, Christians that suffer affliction, it's not according to God's punishment on a sinful world, but it's according to God's fatherly disposition towards his children.

And that distinction between being in Christ and not being in Christ is a very important one. And how God, because God governs all things, so God may govern the same affliction towards those who are unrepentant and the same affliction towards those who are repentant who are under the covenant of grace.

Now, those who are not in Christ are under the law. And the law, God requires perfect obedience of the law, which every person, as we read in the catechism this morning, no man since the fall can keep perfectly the law of God, which is required for eternal blessedness.

[25:17] And because of that, God is just, God is holy, God is righteous, and God's condemnation and God's wrath is over those who break God's law. And they are under the covenant of works.

They have not worked what is necessary. Under the covenant of grace, being in Christ, as Romans 8, 1 says, therefore, there's therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

And, I'm going to go off my notes here, and there's danger in doing that, but, I hope it all makes sense. But, think of baptism. Baptism is being immersed under water and coming up, and it signifies a sacrament, the Lord's Supper and baptism, a sacrament is God's word in visible form.

So, it's the gospel promises brought to our eyes, or it's brought to our hands and our taste. So, it's brought, baptism is God's word in visible form brought to our eyes, and we see the person going

into the water, which represents death.

Water in scripture, in many places, represents death. For example, Jonah, going, going, deep into the water for three days, or Jordan, crossing the Jordan into the promised land, signifies death.

[26:40] death. So, going into the water signifies death, and that is our being united to Christ's death, and all of our sin is put on Christ and paid for in full on the cross.

And going under the water, we're not only died to sin, and united and baptized into Christ's death, but also buried. That is, having died to the covenant of works and the requirements of it, and coming up out of the water is of coming up new life, new birth, regeneration, and Christ's righteousness being ours.

And when we think of baptism, it's to bring to mind the promises of the gospel, and that those who are not united to Christ are still in their sins and still under the condemnation and wrath of God.

Those who are united to Christ are dead to sin. It's as though we have died being united to Christ's death, and all the requirements of the law are paid in full in Christ, and that's done.

And we have come up out of the water as new creations, not under the covenant of works, but under the covenant of grace. And we live by grace being in Christ as God's children.

[28:00] So if you are still under the covenant of works and not under the covenant of grace, the only way to be made right before God is not by our own righteousness, but by the righteousness of Christ, and that is by receiving Christ and all the promises of the gospel in Christ, all the benefits of Christ, his righteousness and forgiveness of sins and salvation, Christ as Lord of our lives, and receiving and resting on Christ alone for salvation.

Let's pray.