



LESSON SEVEN

The Divine Provision for the Inoculation Against the Decline of the Church

Scripture Reading:

2 TIMOTHY 1:1-18

- 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God according to the promise of life, which is in Christ Jesus,
- 1:2 To Timothy, beloved child: Grace, mercy, peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.
- 1:3 I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers in a pure conscience, while unceasingly I have remembrance concerning you in my petitions night and day,
- 1:4 Longing to see you, remembering your tears, that I may be filled with joy;
- 1:5 Having been reminded of the unfeigned faith in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded dwells also in you.
- 1:6 For which cause I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.
- 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power and of love and of sobermindedness.
- 1:8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord nor of me His prisoner; but suffer evil with the gospel according to the power of God;
- 1:9 Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the times of the ages
- 1:10 But now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who nullified death and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel,
- 1:11 For which I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.
- 1:12 For which cause also I suffer these things; but I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard my deposit unto that day.
- 1:13 Hold a pattern of the healthy words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.
- 1:14 Guard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.
- 1:15 This you know, that all who are in Asia turned away from me, of whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.
- 1:16 May the Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain;
- 1:17 But being in Rome, he sought me out diligently and found me.
- 1:18 May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord in that day. And in how many things he served me in Ephesus, you know best.

QUESTIONS:

SECTION 1:

1. When was the book of second Timothy written? How did the apostle Paul open this book and why?
2. What is the purpose of Paul's writing this book?
3. What are the eight basic elements for the inoculation?

SECTION 2:

1. What is the way for us to have a pure conscience?
2. What does faith refer to? How does our faith get strengthened?
3. What kind of spirit did God give us? How do we know?

SECTION 3:

1. When did God bestow grace upon us? When was this grace manifested?
2. Using the two words 'life' and 'incorruption' in verse 10, explain what effect the eternal life of God has.
3. Using verse 12, please explain how Paul can be assured that his "good deposit" will be guarded.

SECTIONS 4:

1. What was the general situation of the churches in Asia according to verse 15?
2. What is God's principle according to the example given in 1 Kings 19:14,18?

Second Timothy, the last Epistle written by Paul, opens with the words, “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, beloved child: Grace, mercy, peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.” This book was written at a time when the churches established through the apostle’s ministry in the Gentile world were in a trend of degradation, and the apostle himself was confined in a remote prison. Many had turned away from him and forsaken him (1:15; 4:16), including even some of his co-workers (4:10). It was a discouraging and disappointing scene, especially to his young fellow-worker and spiritual child, Timothy. Due to this, in the opening of this encouraging, strengthening, and establishing Epistle, he confirmed to Timothy that he was an apostle of Christ, not only through the will of God, but also according to the promise of life which is in Christ. This implies that the churches may become degraded, and many of the saints may backslide in unfaithfulness, but the eternal life, the divine life, the uncreated life of God, promised by God in His holy writings and given to the apostle and all the believers, remains forever the same. With and upon this unchanging life the firm foundation of God has been laid and stands unshaken through all the tide of degradation (2:19). By such a life those who seek the Lord out of a pure heart are able to stand the trial of the church’s decline. This life, on which the apostle in his first Epistle charged Timothy and others to lay hold (6:12, 19), should be an encouragement and strengthening to him in perilous times.

Only in the two Timothys did the apostle include God’s mercy in the opening greeting of his Epistles. God’s mercy reaches farther than His grace. In the degraded situation of the churches, God’s mercy is needed.

I. THE SUBJECT OF THE BOOK: INOCULATION AGAINST THE DECLINE OF THE CHURCH

When Paul was writing this Epistle, he was fully aware that the churches were declining. However, because he was one who laid hold on the promise of eternal life, he was not discouraged or disappointed. He had something within him

which never changed—the eternal, uncreated, incorruptible life of God. No matter how the environment may change, this eternal life remains the same. Because he himself was encouraged in the life of God and not disappointed by the situation, Paul wrote the Second Epistle to Timothy not only as an encouragement and strengthening to a younger co-worker, but also as an inoculation for the entire Body of Christ against the decline of the church.

We should not regard 2 Timothy merely as a so-called pastoral book. If we have the proper insight, we shall realize that the divine thought within Paul was to inoculate the believers against the decline of the church. Paul foresaw this decline. However, deep within he was encouraged, not because he could understand matters according to logic, but because he laid hold of the eternal life promised by God in His holy writings. The very life promised by God in the Scriptures dwelt within Paul. Paul’s burden in writing this Epistle was both to encourage and to strengthen Timothy and also to inject a divine substance into the church in order to inoculate the church against the germ of decline. We praise the Lord that this inoculation has been effective. Yes, the church throughout the centuries has been ruined to a certain extent, but it has not been exterminated. Paul had the foresight to inoculate the church against decline.

My burden in this message is to consider eight basic elements of this inoculation. These divine provisions for the inoculation include a pure conscience, unfeigned faith, the divine gift, a strong spirit, eternal grace, incorruptible life, healthy words, and the indwelling Spirit. These ingredients of the marvelous dose administered by Paul are found in 1:1-14.

II. INTRODUCTION

Verses 1 and 2 are an introductory word. In verse 1 Paul says that he was an apostle not only through the will of God, but also according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus. The expression “the promise of life” does not mean that we have only the promise and not the life. It means that we have received the promised life. A similar term, “the promise of the Spirit,” is used in Galatians 3:14. This term does not mean that

we have received only the promise and have not received the Spirit. It means that we have received the Spirit who has been promised. In the same principle, the words “the promise of life” denote the promised life. Paul was an apostle according to the life which God had promised, which Paul had received, and which dwelt within him. Paul became an apostle by this life.

The eternal life according to which Paul became an apostle is incorruptible and unchanging, for this life is actually the processed Triune God Himself. Because Paul was indwelt by this life, not even the whole Roman Empire was able to prevail over him in its dealings with him. Paul was strengthened by the processed Triune God as life.

Nowhere else but in the opening of this Epistle does Paul say that he was an apostle according to the promise of life. Elsewhere he tells us that he was an apostle through the will of God (Eph. 1:1). Not many Christian teachers emphasize the fact that Paul’s apostleship was not only through the will of God, but also by the promise of eternal life. The reason Christians emphasize the will of God but not the promise of life is that they themselves do not see this matter of life. Whatever we do and whatever we are in the Lord’s recovery today must be according to eternal life and by this life. Praise the Lord that we are in His recovery by this life!

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III. THE DIVINE PROVISIONS FOR THE INOCULATION

The life mentioned in verse 1 includes all the eight basic elements of the inoculation. This means that eternal life includes a pure conscience, unfeigned faith, the divine gift, a strong spirit, eternal grace, the element of incorruption, healthy words, and the indwelling Spirit. If we have this life, which is actually the processed Triune God, we have a pure conscience, unfeigned faith, and all the other provisions of the divine inoculation. Let us now consider these provisions one by one.

A. A Pure Conscience

In verse 3 Paul says, “I thank God, Whom I serve from my forefathers in a pure conscience, how unceasingly I have remembrance concerning you in my petitions night and day.” To serve here is to serve God in His worship (Acts 24:14; Phil. 3:3). Paul followed in the footsteps of his forefathers to serve God in a pure conscience. In a time of degradation, a pure conscience, a conscience purified from any mixture, is needed if we are to serve God.

I have the assurance that all the saints who are so honest, truthful, and faithful to the Lord in His recovery have not only a good conscience, but also a pure conscience. In this matter we should not accept the lie of the enemy. The more we doubt that we have a pure conscience, the more we shall feel that our conscience is not pure. We need to declare, “Satan, get away from me! I have a pure conscience. Satan, don’t you know that I am for the Lord and not for anything else? I am for the Lord, for His recovery, for His church, and for His interests.” The more we testify in an honest way that we have a pure conscience, the stronger will be our realization that our conscience is in fact pure. The way for us to have a pure conscience is to declare by faith, honestly, truthfully, and steadfastly, that we have a pure conscience toward the Lord. Do not listen to your doubts, and do not believe the lies of the enemy. The Lord’s blood prevails against him. Do not believe the enemy when he says that you are weak, or when he accuses you of being impure and not having a good conscience. Do you not love the Lord? Are you not for the Lord and His church? Learn to tell the enemy, “Satan, you have been cheating me long enough. I will not believe you any longer, and I will not allow you to hold me back. I am for the Lord, and I have a pure conscience.”

It is the eternal life which strengthens us to make such a declaration to the enemy. This is why I say that a conscience that is pure and good is included in eternal life. Because we have eternal life within us, we can be strengthened to declare that we have a pure conscience.

B. Unfeigned Faith

Verse 5 says, “Having been reminded of the unfeigned faith in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded dwells also in you.” Here Paul reminds Timothy of the unfeigned faith which is in him. This faith first indwelt Timothy’s grandmother and then his mother. Now it dwells in him. We today may praise the Lord that this faith is also in us. Because we have eternal life, we have unfeigned faith.

Faith refers to the organic union with the Triune God in which we receive God’s infusion through His Word and in His Spirit. The more we touch the Word by exercising our spirit, the more we shall contact the Lord and be infused with Him. As a result, our faith will be strengthened. This faith is actually the reflection of the eternal life we have received. Therefore, to repeat, faith refers to the organic union between us and the Triune God in which we contact the living God through His Word and by His Spirit to receive His infusion.

C. The Divine Gift

In verse 6 Paul goes on to say, “For which cause I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.” This word was written to encourage and strengthen Timothy in his ministry for the Lord, that his ministry not be weakened by Paul’s imprisonment and the degraded situation of the churches. Here Paul seems to be saying to Timothy, “Timothy, I charge you to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you. Something in you is burning. However, it is not sufficient for it just to be burning—you need to fan this gift into flame. You have something in you which is a gift of God. Since you have unfeigned faith, I remind you to fan this gift into flame.”

It is rather difficult to define what Paul means by the gift of God in verse 6. It may refer to a particular spiritual function or ability, something burning within Timothy that enabled him to function in a particular way.

All the saints in the Lord’s recovery need to fan into flame the gift of God which is in them. However, in the meetings many saints seem to throw away the fan. Especially in the meetings of

the church, we need to fan into flame the gift which is in us. Then the flame will grow higher and brighter, and the riches of Christ will be manifest. All the saints need to be encouraged with the fact that they have eternal life, a pure conscience, and unfeigned faith. For this cause, they should fan into flame the gift of God.

D. A Strong Spirit

In verse 7 Paul continues, “For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power and of love and of a sober mind.” The spirit here denotes our human spirit, regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit (John 3:5-6; Rom. 8:16). Fanning into flame the gift of God is related to our regenerated spirit.

Paul says that we have a spirit of power, of love, and of a sober mind. Power refers to our will, love to our emotion, and a sober mind to our mind. This indicates that a strong will, a loving emotion, and a sober mind have very much to do with a strong spirit for the exercise of the gift of God which is in us.

We need to believe that God has given us such a spirit, and we should praise Him for it. We should not say that we do not feel as if we have a spirit of love, power, and a sound mind. In our physical body we usually do not have any feeling with respect to our internal organs unless there is something wrong with them. Under normal circumstances, are you aware of the fact that you have a liver? I may not be conscious of my liver, but I know that I have this organ and that it is functioning. In like manner, we may not feel as if we have the kind of spirit described in verse 7. Nevertheless, we need to believe Paul’s word and exercise our spirit.

In verse 8 Paul says, “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner; but suffer evil with the gospel according to the power of God.” Here we have the reason Paul charged Timothy in the two preceding verses to fan into flame the gift of God which was in him. We need to do this in order not to be ashamed of the testimony of the Lord. Not to be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord is to stand against its downward current in the declining churches. We should also be ready to

suffer evil with the gospel. The gospel, which is personified here, was suffering persecution. Therefore, Timothy should expect to suffer evil along with the gospel. Our suffering of persecution along with the gospel must be to the extent of what the power of God can endure, not limited by the endurance of our natural strength.

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E. Eternal Grace

In 1:9-10a Paul says, speaking of God, “Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before times eternal, but now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus.” God has not only saved us to enjoy His blessing, but also called us with a holy calling, a calling for a particular cause, to fulfill His purpose. The purpose here is God’s plan according to His will to place us into Christ, making us one with Him to share His life and position that we may be His testimony. Grace is God’s provision in life for us to live out His purpose.

The grace given to us in Christ was bestowed upon us before the world began. The phrase “before times eternal” means before the world began. This is a sure and unshakable foundation, standing firmly against the waves of the downward current and exposing the total powerlessness of the enemy’s efforts to counter the eternal purpose of God. In order to strengthen Timothy, the apostle identifies their ministry with this eternal grace, the sure foundation.

In verse 9 Paul says that God’s grace was given to us before times eternal; in verse 10 he says that this grace has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus. God’s grace was given to us in eternity, but was manifested and applied to us through our Lord’s first coming to nullify death and bring life to us. Because this grace was manifested through the appearing of Christ, Old Testament saints like Abraham and David did not experience it. The grace destined to be given to us came with the appearing of the Lord Jesus. This grace is not merely a blessing; it is a Person, the Triune God Himself given to us

to be our enjoyment. This grace came when the Lord Jesus appeared, and now it is with us today.

F. The Incorruptible Life

The last part of verse 10 says of Christ, “Who nullified death, and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel.” Christ nullified death, making it of none effect, through His Devil-destroying death (Heb. 2:14) and death-swallowing resurrection (1 Cor. 15:52-54).

The eternal life of God is given to all believers in Christ (1 Tim. 1:16) and is the main element of the divine grace given to us (Rom. 5:17, 21). This life has conquered death (Acts 2:24) and will swallow up death (2 Cor. 5:4). It was according to the promise of such a life that Paul was an apostle (2 Tim. 1:1). This life and its consequent incorruption have been brought to light and made visible to men through the preaching of the gospel.

Life is the divine element, even God Himself, imparted into our spirit. Incorruption is the consequence of life saturating our body (Rom. 8:11). This life and incorruption are able to counter the death and corruption of the decline among the churches.

Second Timothy 1:11 says, “For which I was appointed a herald, and an apostle, and a teacher.” The relative pronoun “which” refers to the gospel of divine grace and eternal life. This corresponds to the gospel presented in grace and life by the Apostle John (John 1:4, 15-17). For such a gospel Paul was appointed a herald, an apostle, and a teacher. A herald announces and proclaims the gospel, an apostle sets up and establishes the churches for God’s administration, and a teacher gives instructions to the churches with all the saints.

In verse 12 Paul goes on to say, “For which cause also I suffer these things; but I am not ashamed, for I know Whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard my deposit unto that day.” The apostle had a cause for his sufferings, a cause on the highest plane—to proclaim the glad tidings of the gospel of grace and life, to establish the churches, and to instruct the saints. Such a cause should also be an

encouragement and strengthening to Timothy in facing the deterioration of the declining churches. Since Paul was not ashamed, Timothy should not be ashamed either.

In verse 12 Paul says, “I know Whom I have believed.” What the apostle believed was not a thing or a matter, but a living Person, Christ, the Son of the living God, who is the embodiment of divine grace and eternal life. The eternal life in Him is powerful; it is more than able to sustain to the end the one who suffers for His sake and also to preserve him for the inheritance of the coming glory. The grace in Him is more than sufficient to provide His sent one with all he needs for finishing the course of his ministry unto a reward in glory (4:7-8). Hence, He is able to guard that which the apostle has committed unto Him for the day of His return. Such an assurance should also be an encouragement and strengthening to the weakened and sorrowful Timothy.

The words “my deposit” refer to that which Paul had committed to the Lord. The apostle had committed his entire being with his glorious future unto the One who is able, through His life and grace, to guard his deposit unto “that day,” the day of Christ’s second appearing.

G. The Healthy Words

In verse 13 Paul continues, “Hold a pattern of healthy words which you heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.” The preceding word in verse 12 is a pattern, an example, of healthy words. The words of our Lord Jesus Christ are words of life (John 6:63); hence, they are healthy words. The word healthy here refers to the health of life.

H. The Indwelling Spirit

In verse 14 Paul concludes, “Guard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit Who dwells in us.” The Holy Spirit dwells in our spirit (Rom. 8:16). Hence, to guard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit requires us to exercise our spirit.

We have pointed out that the Spirit is the ultimate consummation of the Triune God’s contact with

man. Praise the Lord that today this Spirit dwells in our spirit!

We thank the Lord for all the divine provisions for the inoculation against the decline of the church. The more we experience these provisions, the more we shall be inoculated against any kind of decline. Having such a marvelous inoculation, we should be able to declare that in the Lord’s recovery there is no decline.

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I. THE APOSTASY

In 1:15 Paul says, “This you know, that all who are in Asia turned away from me, of whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.” Asia here refers to the province of Asia. In this verse Paul indicates that believers in Asia who had formerly received the apostle’s ministry now forsook him. In spite of such desertion, the apostle grew stronger in the grace that was in Christ, who was the same and would never change. Without being discouraged, he exhorted his son in faith to persevere steadily in the ministry in the midst of failure and ruin of the churches.

It is difficult to say to whom the words “all who are in Asia” refer. Does it mean that every believer in Asia turned away from Paul? Paul specifically names Phygelus and Hermogenes, two who must have taken the lead to desert the apostle because of his imprisonment. But what about all the other believers in Asia? We cannot say that every one deserted Paul, for Paul mentions Onesiphorus as one who often refreshed him and who sought him out diligently in Rome and found him (vv. 16-17).

A number of expositors say that these verses point to an apostasy, a departure from the truth. But what was the extent of the apostasy? I believe that “all who are in Asia” points to the general situation among the believers in Asia without including every particular believer. Generally speaking, there was apostasy in Asia.

II. THE FAITHFULNESS

Second Timothy 1:15-18 indicates that we cannot be neutral. We are either a Phygelus or Hermogenes, or we are an Onesiphorus. Onesiphorus was an overcomer who resisted the general trend and stood against the down current to refresh the Lord's ambassador in spirit, soul, and body, one who was not ashamed of Paul's imprisonment for the Lord's commission. Concerning him Paul says, "May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord in that day! And in how many things he served in Ephesus, you know very well." The words "that day" refer to the day of the Lord's victorious appearing to reward His overcomers (4:8; Rev. 22:12).

The principle here is nearly the same as that at the time of Elijah. Elijah said to the Lord, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away" (1 Kings 19:14). The Lord replied, "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal" (v. 18). The principle here is that even during a period of decline, a downward trend when most of God's people are carried away, there are always a number who remain faithful. There will always be an Onesiphorus to stand against the downward trend. Yes, Phygelus, Hermogenes, and others in Asia turned away from Paul. But Onesiphorus, an overcomer, stood against the decline, against the down current.

I am certain that both Phygelus and Hermogenes were believers. Otherwise, Paul would not have said that they turned away from him. Phygelus and Hermogenes were with Paul at one time. Probably they were not ordinary believers; they must have been either co-workers or leading ones among the saints. To be sure, they took the lead to turn away from Paul.

Those who turned away from Paul turned away not only from his person, but also from his ministry. Actually, it is not the person himself who is important; it is the ministry carried on by a person which is of extreme importance. When Paul said that certain ones turned away from him, he did not mean that they merely turned away from him as a person, but that they turned away

from his ministry. In perilous times, genuine believers, even leading ones and co-workers, may turn away.