

## On 2 Timothy 1:3-7

I thank God. That simple sentence commences 2 Timothy 1:3-7. Paul thanked God for many reasons, one of which was Timothy's sincere faith. I pray this study of one of my favorite epistles brings gratitude into your heart for God's providence in Paul's and Timothy's lives. It will investigate this pericope by providing a historical context, literary context, an analysis of the syntax, and a concluding reflection about those verses.

To begin, it is necessary to explain the historical context of the letter. The authorship of 2 Timothy is traditionally attributed to Paul because of such tender, warm, and affectionate language towards Timothy. Since Paul was in his second Roman imprisonment, the dating of the letter is most likely between A. D. 66 to 67 (after Nero's persecution beginning in A.D. 64). The nature of his confinement was much different compared to his first, especially in two regards. Only Luke was with Paul (2 Tim 4:11) because all others had deserted him, and there was an expectation of his death (2 Tim 4:6-8).

The purpose of the letter is threefold. Paul's strongest desire was to urge Timothy to come to him immediately (2 Tim 4:9, 21), because his time was severely limited. It is easy to observe, however, that Paul's gist of the letter pertained to the welfare of Timothy's church. Instructions are given for strengthening its organization and preserving the gospel - which can be seen as a passing of the baton, a bestowing of Paul's mantle onto Timothy. Lastly, the epistle

admonishes Timothy to persevere through the difficulties of ministry and sophistry of false teachers, two things which will inevitably come.

Having dissected the historical context of the letter, it is important to investigate Timothy's life and mission. Timothy was from Lystra, a Lycaonian city in Asia Minor, and met Paul sometime around A. D. 51 as this would have been the beginning of Paul's second missionary journey. Timothy was born to a Jewish mother (who later became a Christian) and a Greek father. 2 Timothy, however, is especially specific in giving some names in Timothy's family. His maternal grandmother was Lois and his mother, Eunice – both women of the Christian faith.

Some observations can be made about Timothy personally. Timothy had frequent illnesses (1 Tim 5:23) and perhaps they were due to an anxious nature. 2 Timothy 1:7 could indicate that the worker of the gospel generally had a spirit of fear. Finally, Timothy was young when he entered ministry and some people probably despised his age (1 Tim 4:12). Timothy was nonetheless a faithful steward and close friend of Paul's, possibly the only one left besides Luke around A D. 66.

Now to analyze this passage in its literary context. It is obvious 2 Timothy 1:3-7 lies near the commencement of the letter. What came before was a typical introduction of Paul's:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,

To Timothy, my dear son:

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

If we call that the prelude, then what follows is the main piece. It is pertinent to note that Paul starts the body of his letter with gratitude. That is not atypical of most Pauline writings, but it is

also not a given (Galatians, 1 Timothy and Titus are examples). Interestingly though, 2 Timothy is the only Pauline letter in which the beginning of the body expresses gratitude toward a particular individual.

The snippet of verses chosen are fairly straightforward to codify. Verses 3-5 are a thanksgiving section while the next two verses are an appeal, and this format of introduction-gratitude-appeal is found in many of Paul's epistles. The thanksgiving verses articulate that Paul is grateful for Timothy and his sincere faith. The appeal is for Timothy to rekindle the gift of faith inside him and to be emboldened in love, authority, and self-discipline.

What follows my passage of study is the rest of the appeal, instructions on how to deal with false teachers, and a final charge toward Timothy personally. In general, 2 Timothy is not a long piece of literature – only four chapters in length - and the position of my gobbet's verses does not warrant any special remarks.

Now for the juicy part. The syntax and word choice within 2 Tim 1:3-7 are fairly usual for Paul, but three interesting moments will now be placed under the microscope. The first is the phrase ἀναζωπυρεῖν τὸ χάρισμα τοῦ θεοῦ. It is worthy to note ἀναζωπυρεῖν is a New Testament *hapax* but occurs in classical Greek (Xenophon with *Hell.* 5.4.46 and Plato with *Rep.* 527d-e) and the LXX (Gen 45:27 and 1 Macc 13:7). Meaning “to rekindle into flame,” the word is a present active infinitive of continuous action. The ἀνα is a prefix which, when combined with a verb, usually signifies “up.”<sup>1</sup> However, on certain occasions it can mean “again.”<sup>2</sup> All that is

---

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 364.

<sup>2</sup> Herbert Smyth, *Greek Grammar*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 373.

good to know, but what could the phrase actually mean? Timothy can't literally fan into flame something residing in him.

Most commentators agree it can indicate “to make full use of.” This presupposes that the gift inside Timothy had either faded or lapsed. Put in another way, it seems Paul urged Timothy to “stoke the fire” (to keep it vibrantly burning to maximize its potential) since it was no longer apparent to the same degree in which it was first received. Unfortunately, only speculation is available on how that was done practically, because Paul did not give specific details to Timothy.

But of what specifically was Timothy supposed to maximize the potentiality? The gift of God (τὸ χάρισμα τοῦ θεοῦ) is the answer, but this raises even more questions. What could Paul possibly be referring to here? The Holy Spirit? The authority which comes from ordination? Most likely the gift was “a special endowment or anointing of the Spirit which Timothy received...to equip him for the work to which he had been called.”<sup>3</sup> This makes sense, but reasons for that conclusion need to be elucidated.

That brings us to the next section placed under the microscope, διὰ τῆς ἐπιθέσεως τῶν χειρῶν μου. Much ink in debating commentaries has been used on this phrase, so it would be best to start with the words themselves – διὰ τῆς ἐπιθέσεως (through the laying on) is a genitive construction and its function is one of means; τῶν χειρῶν (of hands) is an objective genitive; and μου (my) is a possessive genitive. Now, some help from Perkins: “In the NT ἐπιθέσεως consistently refers to laying on of hands with reference to some spiritual endowment...Often with parts of the body a possessive pronoun is not required because the “ownership” of the

---

<sup>3</sup> John Stott, *Guard the Gospel: The Message of 2 Timothy*. (Downers Grove and London: BST 1973), 29.

hands, for example, is clear from context. However, here the writer affirms that he had personal involvement in this ritual.”<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, two things may be deduced at this point. First, Timothy’s gift is related to the vocation or ministry into which the laying of hands admitted him, and secondly, that specific act was the means by which the gift was bestowed. Dibelius and Conzelmann write, “Timothy had been consecrated to his office, which gives him authority over several congregations, by the laying on of hands. It is characteristic of the relation between the pneumatic and legal elements in the concept of office that, according to 1 Tim 1:18 and to this passage, it is a pronouncement of a prophet which designates the future bearers of the spirit.”<sup>5</sup>

The third and final consideration pertains to σωφρονισμοῦ. This is a fascinating word, which is translated in many different ways. Although σωφρον can mean any of the following in the Greek: truly moderate, proper, safe-minded, sensible behavior that fits a situation - the NKJV translates renders σωφρονισμοῦ as “a sound mind,” the NIV as “self-discipline,” and the ESV as “self-control.” However one translates the word, it depicts the management of one’s actions and thoughts that would lead to rash decisions, aiding a balanced assessment of a situation. Towner writes, “In this context, it would apply to Timothy’s appraisal of the situation of opposition and confrontation and allow him the clarity of thought necessary to trust in the invisible God despite the threats of very visible opponents.”<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Larry Perkins, *The Pastoral Letters: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017), 163.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 71.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 462.

The microscope slides are now finished and it is time for the big debate, the climax of the whole paper: Does πνεῦμα in v. 7 refer to the human spirit or the Holy Spirit? Both sides will be expounded upon and then a final decision will be reached.

Side number one, arguing that ‘human spirit’ is the correct translation of πνεῦμα, will commence the debate. In actuality, the reasoning is quite straightforward – try substituting “Holy Spirit” in the first part of the sentence and it makes no sense (“For God did not give us a Holy Spirit of fear”). Knight writes, “the negative first statement in this verse has understandably inclined most modern English translations to use “spirit” with a lowercase letter.”<sup>7</sup> He and others feel inclined to let that be the extent of their case.

Side number two would support a reference to the Holy Spirit with the use of τὸ χάρισμα (often associated with the proper noun) in the previous verse. For example, when Paul writes concerning the πνεῦμα given by God (Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 12:7; 2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5) and received by humans (1 Cor. 2:12), he always refers thereby to the Holy Spirit. Also, δυνάμεως is a usual characteristic of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; Eph. 3:16) and ἀγάπης is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

Both sides have good arguments, but the decision of which one is better (or more appropriately, how a reader should view πνεῦμα) falls somewhere in the middle. Towner eloquently writes, “Since the statement here begins with the negative, the generic lower-case “spirit” is probably the best decision after all, as long as one recognizes that the positive affirmation beginning with ἀλλὰ does, indeed, refer to the Spirit of God. If this understanding is

---

<sup>7</sup> George Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1992), 371.

correct, then ἡμῖν, “us,” refers to Christians in general (as in v. 9) rather than just to Paul and Timothy.”<sup>8</sup>

Now for a denouement, a brief moment to unwind before the conclusion. There are two points mentioning in this section. The first is an interesting writing technique Paul incorporates in the verse just studied (v. 7). The iteration of the word καὶ (δυνάμεως καὶ ἀγάπης καὶ σωφρονισμοῦ) creates a polysyndeton, an emphatic device which slows down the reader. It’s as if Paul wants Timothy to especially focus on those three words in the genitive.

The second is the grammatical sequence of the passage studied. Verses 3-5 comprise a thanksgiving section which is strongly connected with verses 6-7, all because of δι’ ἣν αἰτίαν (for this reason). It is a causal phrase which can render the essential meaning of verses 3-7 as such: “Because of the expression and example your sincere faith, Timothy – and definitely your ancestors’ – kindle anew the gift of God inside you!” Furthermore, οὖν shortly appears after verse 7. This small but powerful word “marks some development in the discussion or narrative based upon the prior argument.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, it can be translated as “so then” or “therefore” and propels Paul’s writing and thought even more: “I have shared all these words (verses 3-7) with you, Timothy. Therefore don’t be ashamed (and all the other thoughts expressed in verses 8-14)! ”

Having covered everything worth noting, a conclusion is in order. 2 Timothy is an encouraging letter from a spiritual father to his son. It was written during a challenging time both for the author and receiver. Paul was about to be executed; Timothy was probably feeling

---

<sup>8</sup> Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 371.

<sup>9</sup> Perkins, *The Pastoral Letters*, 164.

outnumbered by false teachers, exacerbated by his own delegated authority within question. In the midst of these grave situations, however, is a letter abounding in thanksgiving.

The purpose of writing 2 Timothy was three-pronged: to give instructions on how to confront false teachers, to exhort Timothy in persevering through hardships and to urge the young pastor to come see Paul quickly. The historical context of the letter comes sharply into view when looking at Timothy's life. Timothy was fearful because of many possible reasons – people were despising his age, Paul's reputation was declining, sophistry was encroaching upon his doorsteps. Thankfully though, Timothy came from good 'spiritual stock' because of his mother and grandmother, let alone the powerful mentorship and friendship of Paul.

There is not much to review in terms of literary context. After a typical introduction of Paul's, the body commences with a thanksgiving portion. This section, however, is remarkable since it's the only epistolary body which commences with gratitude toward a particular individual. Also, that is where the studied verses for this gobbet appear. The rest of the letter contains an appeal, advice on handling false teachers and a last exhortation for Timothy.

Syntax! Three specific moments should be remembered from the syntax portion: ἀναζωπυρεῖν τὸ χάρισμα τοῦ θεοῦ, διὰ τῆς ἐπιθέσεως τῶν χειρῶν μου, and σωφρονισμοῦ. The first two of the list are actually quite interrelated, because the laying on of hands was the instrument in which the gift of God was imparted into Timothy. And the third microscope slide was tricky to translate, but knowing the root σωφρον (truly moderate, proper, safe-minded, sensible behavior that fits a situation) gives the reader a more accurate understanding of its use. In the big debate over πνεῦμα, it was decided the word should be viewed as *both* spirit and Spirit. And finally, the polysyndeton in v. 7 and the grammatical sequence of verses 3-7 were effective writing techniques Paul incorporated.



To sum up everything, the verses studied in this gobbet were a useful snapshot into Timothy and Paul's lives. I, personally, am very grateful for this passage of Scripture since I see so much of myself in Timothy. In other words, what Paul shared with his protégé, I definitely receive as well! Χάριν ἔχω τῷ θεῷ, indeed, χάριν ἔχω τῷ θεῷ!

## Bibliography

- Dibelius, Martin, and Hans Conzelmann. *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972.
- Knight, George. *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1992.
- Perkins, Larry. *The Pastoral Letters: A Handbook on the Greek Text*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017.
- Smyth, Herbert. *Greek Grammar*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984.
- Stott, John. *Guard the Gospel: The Message of 2 Timothy*. Downers Grove and London: BST, 1973.
- Towner, Philip. *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006.
- Wallace, Daniel. *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.