

# Divine Directives for Gospel Ministry

## 2 Timothy 1-4

How should pastors and believers be faithful and fruitful with the gospel? Paul's counsel and example lights the way.

LTS: 2 Timothy 3

The epistle we are considering today presents Paul's final exhortations to his young protégé, Timothy. After this short letter we have no further communication from the Apostle Paul.

- These are his final words to the church.
- These are the last concerns of his heart as it relates to Timothy's life and ministry,
- and because they are his final words, we should pay special attention to what he says.

My plan, beginning this morning, is to lead us through a relatively short series of messages on the epistle of 2 Timothy. But since this letter comes to us at the end of Paul's life, I thought it might be helpful to take a few minutes to refresh the story of Paul from the beginning of his life. So, let's launch this study with a brief biography of the Paul, the apostle to the gentiles.

## I. The Lost Life of a Professional Zealot

The name "Paul" from the Greek is Paulus meaning "little"<sup>1</sup> which, perhaps, explains why he is often portrayed by artists and biographers as a rather short person. One unique characteristic of Paul is the fact that he is identified by two names. In the book of Acts, Luke refers to him as "Saul, also known as Paul."<sup>2</sup> Among his fellow citizens of Rome and other gentile acquaintances he was called Paul. Among his Jewish friends and family, however, he would have been known as Saul, (perhaps after Israel's first king).

2. Best I can tell, a boy born to Jewish parents having a Roman name and a Hebrew name was not typical in ancient times. Usually a person lived either in the Roman world or in the Jewish world, but it would have been rare to find a full-blooded Jew who was also an official citizen of the Roman Empire. Such was the case, however, with the man who would become the great apostle Paul. His birth place was not

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<sup>1</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1967), 627

<sup>2</sup> Acts 13:9

somewhere in the lands of Israel but in the Roman city of Tarsus located at the N.E corner of the Mediteranian Sea.

3. We are not told how Paul's Family happened to be located in Tarsus or how his father (a respected Pharisee) happened to achieve the status of Roman citizenship. It seems, clear. however, that Paul's father was an educated man of means and reputation. What we know for sure is that his son, young Saul of Tarsus, was destined to make an impact upon the whole world.

4. Tarsus was a bustling city of merchants and manufacturing. It was particularly known for making goat's hair cloth and other kinds of fabric. In fact, it was probably here in tarsus (perhaps later in life) that Paul learned his trade of tent making.<sup>3</sup>

5. As a boy, he was cradled in orthodox judaism. With regard to education, in the early years he would have been home schooled - his parents being his teachers in accordance with God's command in Deut. 6. The core of such education would have focused on the law of God and the history of Israel. And every year at the feast of first fruits he would have joined his family at the Temple in Jerusalem and recited the creed of Deut. 26:5-9 which reads as follows:

A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. <sup>6</sup> And the Egyptians treated us harshly and humiliated us and laid on us hard labor. <sup>7</sup> Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. <sup>8</sup> And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders. <sup>9</sup> And he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O LORD, have given me.

10. And so, for the earliest years of his life he would have been taught the special place the nation of Israel enjoyed in the heart of God.

- He would learned of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- He would have become acquainted with Moses and Aaron and the 40 years of wandering in the desert because of the nation's unbelief and sin.
- He would have heard of the miracles of crossing the Red Sea and then again the Jordan River.

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 18:3

- He would have heard the terrible story of how, because of Israel's idolatry, God sent Nebuchadnezzar to take God's people captive for 70 years in Babylon.
- And he would have learned the importance of never allowing himself or his nation to turn their backs on God to be cast into exile again.

11. "At some point, probably about age five or six, Jewish fathers assumed the greater responsibility for educating their sons. This included apprenticeship in the father's occupation."<sup>4</sup> In Saul's case, his Father was a Pharisee, one of the ruling class of Israel, so young Saul would have been educated in synagogue classes where the focus was primarily rote memory of the O.T. Scriptures. When you read the writings of Paul the apostle you can only conclude that young Saul of Tarsus learned his lessons well. His mastery of the O.T. text is more than impressive.

12. The centerpiece of such education was attending Synagogue every Sabbath "to hear the Rabbi read the Scriptures and explain the law. [Centuries later] this activity inspired the muslims to nickname the Jews, "The people of the book."<sup>5</sup>

13. His father being a faithful Jew ensured young Saul would have received elementary education in "house of the book"(the synagogue). "And while the teaching was religiously oriented, reading, writing, and elementary arithmetic were taught" as well.<sup>6</sup> Learning to read and write would equip Saul to obey the command of the Lord to all Israelite men to write the precepts of the Lord on their doorposts and their gates. By the time he was ten years old he would have been studying the mishna with its involved interpretations of the Law.<sup>7</sup>

14. When he turned 13 (the age of manhood) "he was expected to assume personal responsibility for obedience to the Law."<sup>8</sup> Saul's father sent him to Jerusalem to complete his education. There, young Jewish men would meet with scribes and rabbis in the home, in the synagogue, and even in the temple to further their education. In fact, in Luke 2, this is precisely where we find Jesus; in the temple "sitting among the teachers, listening to them, asking them questions, and answering

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<sup>4</sup> Vos, H. F. (1999). *Nelson's new illustrated Bible manners & customs: how the people of the Bible really lived* (p. 451). Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers.

<sup>5</sup> J.I. Packer & M.C. Tenny, *Illustrated Manners and Customs of the Bible*, (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1980),

<sup>6</sup> Merrill Tenney, 759

<sup>7</sup> J.I. Packer, 550

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 550

theirs.<sup>9</sup> This is what Saul's education would have looked like, at least in part. And so it was for every young man who hoped to become a rabbi in Israel.

15. In Saul's case, however, he was apprenticed to one particular Rabbi whose name was Gamaliel. This Gamaliel was a Pharisee, an eminent doctor of the law, [a member of the sanhedrin]... and the first of only seven rabbis to be given the title of Rabban" (Master Teacher).<sup>10</sup> In his day he was perhaps the most respected rabbi in all Israel. This is the same Gamaliel who in Acts 5, "when the enraged Sanhedrin sought to slay the Apostles for their bold testimony to Christ, [he] stood up in the council and urged caution on the ground that if the new doctrine [the gospel] were of God they would not overthrow it, and if it were of man it would perish by itself."<sup>11</sup>

16. While under the tutelage of this renown scholar Saul would have opportunity to broaden his education in every direction. Not only O.T. Law, but Greek philosophy and poetry, logic and rhetoric., and young Saul excelled in them all. The more accomplished he became in intellect and wisdom and leadership the greater his reputation became among the Jewish elite. Moreover, it seems that the heights of his intellect and reputation were matched only by his zeal for his religion and his nation.

17. Like his Father before him, Saul attached himself to the Pharisees, the most conservative and strict party of the Jewish sanhedrin. As such, he was determined to "resist the efforts of their Roman conquerors to impose new beliefs and ways of life upon them."<sup>12</sup> But it wasn't only the Romans they were concerned about. It was also any sect in Israel who might undermine the rules and traditions of the nation.

18. By the time Paul turned 30<sup>13</sup> he was already an acknowledged leader in Judaism.<sup>14</sup> We know that because in Acts 9:14 we are told that the chief priests (who where the highest ruling class in Israel) had entrusted him with the authority to bind in chains all who called upon the name of Jesus. And this he did with erelentless zeal.

19. Years later, after becoming a devoted disciple of Chist – he reflected upon this season of his life, and confessed (Acts 26:10): "I not only locked many of the saints in

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<sup>9</sup> Luke 2:41-51

<sup>10</sup> Merrill Tenney, 298

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 298

<sup>12</sup> Packer and Tenny, 550

<sup>13</sup> This is merely an estimate based on my sense of Jewish standards of leadership.

<sup>14</sup> Packer & Tenny, 627

prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them.” Saul became a violent persecutor of the church.

20. In today’s vernacular, we would probably refer to him as terrorist or religious “hitman, or Nazi.” His very presence inspired fear in the hearts of those whom he had authority to arrest, imprison, flog, beat with rods, and condemn to public execution.

21. The N.T. doesn’t acquaint us with Saul of Tarsus until the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Acts. And then, only in the context of an angry mob stoning that dear saint of God, Stephen, to death. We read in that passage, “And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.”

22. It’s interesting to note that Jesus and Saul were contemporaries. They were born only a couple years apart. That means that Saul was likely in Israel during the three years Jesus ministered there. And yet, there is NO mention of him. Perhaps he was one of the unnamed Pharisees who attempted to outwit Jesus at the behest of the Sanhedrin. We just don’t know. What we do know is that after the resurrection, Saul of Tarsus was determined to crush this seemingly traitorous Jewish sect called “the way;”<sup>15</sup> the fledgling church of Jesus Christ.

23. To be sure, Saul was making excellent progress toward destroying the church. In Acts 8:3 we read, “But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.”

- How many precious families were mercilessly torn apart?
- How many children lost their fathers.
- How many watched their dear mothers being violently carried off to jail?
- And all the while, Saul thought he was being a faithful servant of God.
- He said (Acts 26) “I myself was convinced that I ought to do these things in opposition to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.”
- And this was in fulfillment of the prophecy of Jesus himself, who warned, “The hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God” (Jon. 16:2).

24. It seemed there was no end to the terror of this young tyrant until he eradicated every Christian from the face of the earth. But then something happened that was so shocking, so earthshattering, so stupendous that it would change the course of civilization on planet earth for ever. Turn with me to Acts chapter 9 and we will read it together.

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<sup>15</sup> Acts 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22

Read Acts 9:1-8

25. The Damascus Rd. experience exploded upon Paul's life like a hundred megaton bomb. The blast radius of this event reached to the furthest extremities of Paul's ambitions, intellect, values and deepest motives of his heart.

- Everything about him was shattered that day!
- Everything shifted.
- Everything about Paul's life was scrambled and realigned by the sheer force of the manifest presence of Almighty God.
- The greatest man in Israel came face to face with the true King of Israel, his life was placed in the balance and was found wanting.

26. On that day Saul came face to face not with Jesus the Teacher, or Jesus the miracle worker, or Jesus the sacrificial Lamb, but Jesus the supreme and sovereign Judge. No doubt the appearance of Christ before Paul that day was something like the appearance that John saw in Revelation chapter one. John tells us he saw,

One like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. <sup>14</sup> The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, <sup>15</sup> his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. <sup>16</sup> In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

27. My friends, behold Jesus, the terror and beauty of the Christ of God. And John said, "When I saw him I fell at his feet as though dead."

28. This was exactly Paul's experience. The presence of the living, resurrected Christ crushed the most terrifying man in Israel. So devastating was the force of the appearance of his Maker, it knocked him to the ground and the glory of it blinded him in an instant. The mighty Saul of Tarsus found himself face down in the dust trembling like a terrified child.

29. Well, you know how the story goes from there. Saul remains blind for three days until Ananias comes and restores his sight. Saul is filled with the Spirit of God and is baptized. From that moment everything was different. It was as if Saul had been... (how shall we describe it?) born again. And indeed he was. This persecutor of Christ

became the foremost preacher of the Gospel of Christ. He who was determined to conquer, bowed instead in surrender. And having surrendered to the God's King, he became His most loyal and devoted subject.

30. Thus ends the Lost Life of a Professional Zealot. Most of the N.T. then, records for us...

## II. The Long Labor of a Faithful Servant

1. Instantly, right there in Damascus, Saul begins preaching. Acts 9:20 reads, "And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God. And all who heard him were amazed... And Saul increased all the more in strength and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ." I can't help but observe here that on the Damascus Road Saul was NOT only "born again," but his great intellect was instantly redeemed.

2. Immediately, the Jewish leaders sought to kill him. There is that fateful scene where the brothers lower him over the wall in a basket. Barnabas then takes him to Jerusalem and convinces the apostles to hear Saul's testimony and they received him and send him home to Tarsus where he spends 14 years studying, teaching and relearning what the O.T. teaches about Messiah.

3. It is no hyperbole to say that for the first time in his life, even with all the years of theological education, Saul finally understands his bible. For the first time He understands God's plan for the suffering servant – the Messiah. With his whole being he embraces the gospel, and salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

4. No doubt this is precisely what was on his mind when he wrote those magnificent words to the church of Philippi (Phil. 3:4-11)

If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. <sup>7</sup> But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my... Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— <sup>10</sup> that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his

sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

5. If there is anyone here who doubts that God can change a person – I mean REALLY change a them from the inside out – you need look no further for evidence to the contrary than to the life of Saul of Tarsus who became Paul the great apostle of Jesus Christ.

6. For the rest of his life Saul, who in his ministry as Apostle would be known as Paul, would travel the known world preaching the gospel. By land, by sea, by any means possible. Sometimes with a trusted friend, often alone, occasionally with a small party of loyal helpers. On his first missionary journey he met a young man named Timothy who apparently trusted in Christ under Paul's preaching. Two years later on Paul's second missionary journey Paul met him again. And this time he was so impressed with Timothy's maturity, godliness and obvious giftedness that he invited him to become one of his closest ministry companions.

7. Before long it becomes apparent that eventually someone would need to take over after Paul's death. Timothy was the obvious choice.

8. So when we come to the epistle of 2 Timothy, Paul (who having endured over the years countless beatings, often to the brink of death,

- merciless lashings, having been stoned and left for dead;
- Shipwrecks; in danger from rivers,
- danger from robbers,
- danger from his own people,
- danger from Gentiles,
- danger in the city,
- danger in the wilderness,
- danger at sea,
- danger from false brothers;
- in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure... (2 Cor. 11)

9. The result of his years of ministry made all the suffering worthwhile. For all across Asia Minor churches had been planted, who were faithfully (though NOT infallibly) spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem and Judea, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.



10. After all of that, he finds himself in a cold and lonely prison cell in Rome awaiting the final verdict upon his life. And just before he is executed, he pens a letter to his faithful friend and protégé, Timothy. For our purposes we will call it,

### **III. The Last Letter of a Spiritual Father:**

1. There are only four chapters in this short letter. But in the few pages Paul covers a lot of ground. His goal is to offer some final words of encouragement and exhortation about How pastors (and believers) should pursue faithfulness and fruitfulness with the gospel?

2. From the beginning Paul calls upon Timothy to never be ashamed of the gospel (8) and be willing to suffer for the privilege of sharing it with others. And why would we be ashamed? For (9) “God saved us called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of His own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ before the ages began.” This is the gospel!

3. In chapter two he exhorts Timothy to always be about the business of producing and multiplying spiritual leaders for the church. He says (2:2) “And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” This would be no easy task as it requires the constant ministry of the word of God. And if you are going to teach the Word properly it will take the concerted effort of study. So, Paul famously says (15) “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.” (AWANA)

4. The word of God itself is a major theme in this letter. One of the most important and best-known verses in 2 Timothy is found in verses 15-16, “All Scripture us breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

5. Then in chapter 4 he seals the gospel minister’s prime directive. With strong exhortation Paul writes (4:1-2)

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: <sup>2</sup> preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

5. This is no business for the weak of heart. Throughout the letter Paul exhorts Timothy to endure and persevere. No one makes a great impact on the world by being casual, disengage, and easily discouraged. He exhorts Timothy to approach gospel ministry like a soldier, and athlete, and a farmer. Gospel ministry requires diligent effort and patient endurance and it will involve personal suffering. In fact, five times in this short letter Paul mentions suffering; his own, and that of anyone who strives to be faithful in gospel ministry. For (3:12) “all who desire to live a godly life will be persecuted.” So Paul invites Timothy to (1:8) “share in my suffering.

3. And all the while, Paul communicates the security and joy that he experiences as a faithful minister of the gospel because (12) “I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to guard what he has entrusted to me until that Day.”

4. I don't know about you, but I'm excited about what the next few months of study in this, **The Last Letter of a Spiritual Father**.

Gospel Appeal...