

# Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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## A Christmas Message: The appearing of our Saviour

### Introduction

Welcome to the third and final part of our Christmas message. It may be New Year when you are listening to this, but what better way to start a new year than to think about the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ?

Part 1 of our Christmas message showed us how we come from law to liberty and from slavery to sonship by God's sending of His Son, "*When the fullness of the time had come...*", Galatians 4:4.

Part 2 found us spoiled by our sins and unable to do anything of any value to God. Then God showed His kindness and mercy through the Son and the Spirit, "*When the kindness and the love of God our Saviour toward man appeared...*", Titus 3:4.

Today, in part 3, we start right back in eternity. This time **the gospel** is the main theme, and this gospel is grounded in, "*...the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ...*" (2 Timothy 1:10)

But I am getting rather ahead of myself! Let's read our passage for this morning, which is taken from 2 Timothy 1:8-11: "*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 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 time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Saviour 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.*"

You might have noticed that all four verses that we have just read constitute one long, rather complex, sentence! We will need to break it down into bite-sized chunks to try and grasp what God is saying to us from His word.

### Do not be ashamed (2 Timothy 1:8)

The first clause we come to is an instruction, "*Do not be ashamed.*" To start to understand this we will need to remember the wider context of the book called 2 Timothy. This is a personal epistle, or letter, written by Paul, now an aging servant of God, to his younger friend and fellow servant, Timothy. Paul is coming towards the end of his own life and service, and is preparing to hand on the responsibility to this younger man. If we read on into 2 Timothy 4:6-7 we find Paul saying, "*For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*" Paul and Timothy have worked together in Christian service for some time, often physically together, more recently, with Timothy taking responsibility in Ephesus and Paul imprisoned in Rome.

Paul writes this letter to both encourage and challenge, this sometimes-diffident younger man (see 2 Timothy 1:6-7, 1 Timothy 4:14), who seems to lack confidence and apparently suffers some ill health (1 Timothy 5:23). Paul seeks to rouse up, energise and embolden Timothy for the struggles ahead, that he will have to face without his friend and father-figure, Paul.

For these reasons, after two verses of introduction (2 Timothy 1:1-2), Paul has spent the previous five verses (2 Timothy 1:3-7) telling Timothy of his unceasing prayers for him, and reminding Timothy of his personal history of faith, and the gift of God, and the power of God to exercise that gift. So, what might Timothy have to be ashamed of?

Firstly, he is exhorted not to be ashamed of "*the testimony of our Lord*", that is the gospel. We all have times when we are embarrassed to speak up for the Lord, or defend the gospel, but there is never any real cause. The gospel is the whole counsel of God for the salvation and blessing of men and women. It takes in the Christmas message of Christ appearing as a little child, the Easter message of His death and resurrection and all the blessings that come to us when we accept salvation through faith in Him. There is no reason to be ashamed of any of that! I can reasonably be ashamed of my own behaviour at times. I can properly be ashamed that I am such a hopeless sinner that I needed the

death of God's own Son to set me free. But I can never have good cause to be ashamed of the gospel, or the Saviour it is centred on.

Secondly, Timothy is exhorted not to be ashamed of Paul, the Lord's prisoner. Being a prisoner might naturally be something to be ashamed about, but Paul knew that he was only a prisoner because of his faithfulness to the Lord Jesus and His gospel. Since neither the Lord nor the gospel were things to be ashamed of, he was not embarrassed about being in jail. He tells Timothy that he should not be ashamed to be associated with Paul the prisoner.

Given all that Timothy owed to the Apostle, it would have been very poor repayment to dissociate himself from Paul now that he was imprisoned. If a fellow believer is suffering persecution and shame in some way because of their faithfulness to Christ, we should be happy to stand with them and risk any of that shame attaching to us as well. In 2 Timothy 4:16 Paul has to say, *"At my first defence no one stood with me, but all forsook me."* Given that Paul's defence was before a wicked, deranged Nero, we can understand why others were reluctant to take their place alongside him. Nevertheless, it is shameful that Paul was left to face this alone. Of course, he goes on to say, *"But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me..."* (2 Timothy 4:17), but that doesn't excuse those who failed to stand with him!

### **Share in suffering for the gospel (2 Timothy 1:8)**

Paul's next exhortation is for Timothy to share with him in his sufferings for the gospel (2 Timothy 1:8). That might mean supporting and assisting Paul in his hardship, or it may mean showing the same faithfulness and boldness that Paul had shown and risking ending up in a prison cell himself. Paul's assumption, like that of the Lord Jesus, is that Christians who live positively for the Lord, spread the gospel actively, and speak up openly, are bound to suffer persecution of some sort from the large number of people who are opposed to Christ and His gospel. Suffering might be a natural by-product of living faithfully, but having the strength to deal with such suffering is far from natural. For that, we need the power of God. In fact, we need the power of God for everything we do as believers. We need God's power to live righteously. We need it to speak up boldly about the gospel, and we need it, when necessary, to suffer as a result of speaking up. It is noteworthy that Paul uses the phrase, *"share with me in the sufferings"* (2 Timothy 1:8)

He makes it a matter of sharing, or fellowship. In Philippians 3:10 Paul says, *"That I may know [Christ] and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings."* Paul considered it something to be sought after, to share with Christ in the fellowship of suffering for doing good. He now wants Timothy to have a similar fellowship with himself. The result will be that Timothy thereby enters into that fellowship with Christ as well.

### **God saved us (2 Timothy 1:8)**

The God who gives us the power to suffer for Him, is the God who saved us. We've been thinking over this Christmas season about how and why Jesus came into this world. He came as a helpless little baby because we were helpless sinners and He loved us. He came to save. Remember, *"You shall call His name JESUS for He will save..."* Matthew 1:21. How can we be ashamed of the God who saved us? How can it be so unacceptable to suffer for the One who sent His only Son to be our Saviour?

### **God called us (2 Timothy 1:9)**

At this point, Paul takes up one of the central themes of this passage, that God called us. Now the calling of God can mean several things in the New Testament. It may be a very general call to repentance, such as Jesus makes in Mark 2:17, *"I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* All sinners are called. Only some will respond. At other times, the word "call" is used much more specifically, for example Romans 1:6, *"You also are the called of Jesus Christ."* This clearly refers only to believers, those who have trusted Christ as Saviour. Paul always uses the words, "call", "called" and "calling" in this more specific sense.

If Paul refers to God calling somebody, there is never any doubt about whether they will respond. So, when Paul talks in verse nine of our chapter about how God has called us, he is effectively talking about the election of God. This is the call He makes to those He has already chosen for Himself. This will become clearer as we work our way down the passage. For now, we will notice four things about this calling.

1. It is a "holy calling";
2. It is a calling, "not according to our works" (2 Timothy 1:9);
3. It is, in fact, "according to His own purpose" (2 Timothy 1:9); and
4. Our call is according to God's grace.

### 1. It is a *“holy calling”*

It is a *“holy calling”* because it comes from the Holy God and everything He does is holy. It is a holy calling because it is a call to holiness, both through a full salvation and as a call to *“Be holy because I am holy”* (see 1 Peter 1:16). It is a holy calling because the root meaning of holiness is to be set apart for God’s use, and the called are indeed set apart for Him.

### 2. It is a calling, *“not according to our works”* (2 Timothy 1:9)

This means that we didn’t earn or deserve God’s calling. God didn’t notice our good works, either during our lifetime, or by His divine foreknowledge before we were born, and therefore decide to call us. The calling is not related to our actions or works whatsoever.

### 3. It is, in fact, *“according to His own purpose”* (2 Timothy 1:9)

Put simply, the choice was God’s own, made for reasons that are entirely His own. This is very similar to what God says about His love for Israel in Deuteronomy 7:7-8, *“The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you.”*

We could paraphrase that as, *“The LORD loves you, because the LORD loves you”*, that is, because He chooses to! He loves us, and calls us, for just the same, God-centred reason!

### 4. Our call is according to God’s grace

This underlines once again that we deserve nothing and that all the motivation is from God’s side. We don’t get anything that we deserve by grace. Grace is God’s giving to us that which we have no hope of ever earning, simply because God loves to give. This is the foundation of our calling.

#### Given to us: in Christ Jesus

The grace and calling were given to us, *“In Christ Jesus”* (2 Timothy 1:9). All God’s blessings for us reach us in Christ Jesus. We remember at Christmas time that without the sending and coming of God’s Son there never could be any salvation or blessing for human beings. We had sinned away any hope of blessing and were incapable of climbing back up towards God. So, God came down, in the Person of Jesus Christ! God’s grace reaches us in Christ Jesus. We are called in Christ Jesus. *“[We are] blessed ... with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ”* as Ephesians 1:3 says.

#### Given to us: Before time began

All this was, *“before time began”* (2 Timothy 1:9) This brings us back to the concept of the eternal election of God. We were called in Christ Jesus before time began. This means at least three things:

1. The gospel was planned before time;
2. We were called and shown grace in Christ Jesus; and
3. We were called and shown grace before time began

#### 1. The gospel was planned before time

Far from being a reaction to the sin of Adam and those that followed him, God’s gospel was planned before **time** even existed, let alone the world, or the human race.

#### 2. We were called and shown grace in Christ Jesus

God was always going to save us through His Son. There was never any doubt who our Saviour would be, or by what means He would save us.

#### 3. We were called and shown grace before time began

Which means that, however impossible it may be for us to fully understand, God chose us (which is what election means) before we ever existed and had ever done right or wrong.

## Our calling is now revealed (2 Timothy 1:10)

This calling and planned grace were hidden from human sight right until the first Christmas occurred. They have only now been revealed according to Paul. The salvation of Israel was plainly declared in the Old Testament. That salvation would also be extended to Gentiles was spelled out, but only as they came into the blessing of the Jews by joining themselves to them. The free forgiveness of sins, to anybody who comes to Christ through faith, and the wonderful family relationship that such believers are brought into, were kept concealed until Christ came.

### By “the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ”

Our passage is explicit that these things were only, “...revealed by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 1:10). What a truly wonderful day that was when Jesus Christ appeared to be our Saviour. He was manifest to Mary, to angels, to the shepherds and then the circle kept widening out until it included you and me! He appeared! Many of our Christmas carols emphasise that the invisible God was now made visible. The unapproachable could now be approached and held. The very God of heaven had appeared in His own creation to accomplish the salvation of His own creatures! We sometimes refer to our Lord’s coming into this world as His **first** appearing. There will be a **second** appearing, when He comes to judge and to reign. Paul refers to this in 2 Timothy 4:1, “I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom.” The Lord Jesus Christ will appear again, but this time it will be for judgement and to take up the rule of the world in His coming Kingdom. But Paul’s exhortation based on this second appearing is very instructive: 2 Timothy 4:2 continues with, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season.” Whether Paul is looking at Christ’s first appearing when the gospel of grace is revealed, or at His second appearing when judgment and condemnation are revealed, it always reminds him of the need for preaching the gospel.

### Christ’s is represented as accomplishing three things through His appearance:

1. He has abolished death;
2. His appearing has brought life to light; and
3. His appearing has brought immortality to light.

#### 1. He has abolished death

That is a quite staggering accomplishment! Politicians would love to have the power to abolish things like poverty, crime or injustice. Abolishing those things would indeed be spectacular and wonderfully worthwhile achievements but no politician ever came close to performing such feats! But what would we think of somebody who claimed to be able to abolish death! It would make the most outrageous claims of politicians and pundits seem commonplace. The idea of abolishing death is obviously absurd! But Paul says this is exactly what Jesus did by His appearing! Of course, it wasn’t the events of Christmas **by themselves** that abolished death. The Lord’s appearing means more than just the fact of His incarnation. It takes in the whole work that He committed Himself to do when He entered this world. It includes His growing up, His public ministry, His death, resurrection and ascension. Hebrews 2:14-15 reads, “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, [Jesus] likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” A couple of verses from 1 Corinthians 15, the great chapter of resurrection, are relevant here.

- 1 Corinthians 15:26, “The last enemy that will be destroyed is death”; and then
- 1 Corinthians 15:54-55 “Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory.’”

At the moment, Christians still grow old and die. Death still appears to retain its power. But this is a false impression! For believers in Christ, death has been abolished. It is no accident that the New Testament talks about believers falling asleep rather than dying.

This isn’t a polite euphemism, it is a statement that all believers will rise again in incorruptibility. We are straying towards our next points, but it is good to remember that the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ means death is abolished, even though we don’t see this fully worked out yet.

#### 2. His appearing has brought life to light

The opposite of death is life. Death has been abolished, life has been revealed, or brought to light. John 1:4 says about Christ, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” So, in a general sense, Jesus birth brought life to light. Moreover, Jesus was able to say to Martha, who was grieving the loss of her brother Lazarus, “I am the resurrection and the life”, John 11:25. The Lord Jesus is the One who not only **is** life, but **provides** life for those who

are dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). Such life, freely provided to all those who come to God through faith in Christ, was never known, not even imagined, until Jesus Christ appeared in this world.

### 3. His appearing has brought immortality to light

The life that Jesus' appearing has brought to light is not the same as our natural life. Naturally, we are born, we live, we die. The life that comes from new-birth is not subject to death - we have just been reflecting on how death has been abolished for believers in Christ. This life is of the same order as Christ's own life, it involves immortality, that is, it is not subject to death. Once again, immortality wasn't just brought to light because Jesus, who is the immortal God, came into the world. That is true of course, but it is not the core meaning of 2 Timothy 1:10. The wonder of Jesus appearing is that it makes immortality available for human beings! What an amazing difference commenced when God's own Son came as a tiny baby into a manger at Bethlehem!

#### Through the gospel

2 Timothy 1:8-11 declare that all these three things that the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ accomplished are achieved *"through the gospel"* (2 Timothy 1:10). This is the gospel that Timothy (and ourselves) must not be ashamed of. This is the gospel that we should be ready to suffer for. This is the gospel that our eternal calling is based on, and this is the gospel that we must always be ready to proclaim to others.

#### Paul's responsibilities for the gospel (2 Timothy 1:11)

Paul now goes on to talk about his own connection to the gospel. He has three responsibilities for the gospel, and he was given these responsibilities by God Himself.

1. Paul was appointed a preacher of the gospel;
2. Paul was appointed an Apostle of the gospel; and
3. Paul was appointed a Teacher of this gospel to the Gentiles.

#### 1. Paul was appointed a Preacher of the gospel

Paul had a special responsibility in this regard. At his very conversion he was commissioned by Christ directly, to preach the gospel. He says about himself, in 1 Corinthians 9:16, *"If I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me, yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!"* None of us have this special commission from God, even Timothy didn't. Nor do we have the special gift as a preacher that Paul had. But we are all still called to be preachers of the gospel at some level. In 2 Timothy 4:5 Timothy is exhorted to, *"Do the work of an evangelist."* I don't believe this implies that Timothy had the particular gift of being an evangelist. Timothy's gifts seem to have been those of teaching and church administration. But Timothy, in common with all of us who have been saved by the gospel, had a responsibility to do the evangelist's work of telling other people.

#### 2. Paul was appointed an Apostle of the gospel

Timothy was not an Apostle, and neither are we, or anybody else who is alive today. The Apostles had a very specific role in the establishing of the church in its earliest days. Today, we must maintain the teaching and the pattern of good behaviour that the Apostles established. That is our responsibility to the gospel in this area.

#### 3. Paul was appointed a Teacher of this gospel to the Gentiles

Paul was a teacher as well as a preacher, and he was especially the teacher of the Gentiles. Although he was a devout Jew, God appointed Him specifically to take the good news of salvation to the Gentile nations. Paul carried the gospel ever outwards, reaching out to the regions of Europe. Those of us who live on that continent owe a great debt to the teacher of the Gentiles. But we owe an even greater debt to the Saviour who is the subject of that gospel, and He calls us to share whatever teaching we have with those who know less than us. I was speaking recently about the young Jewish slave girl who spoke to General Naaman's wife about how he might be cured of his leprosy (see 2 Kings 5:1-19). She didn't wait until she was an expert on all matters of Jewish law and custom before she spoke to her mistress. The little bit she knew and understood, she told to somebody who needed to know. Whether we are trying to preach or teach the gospel to others, this little girl is a great model to follow.

#### Conclusion

Paul was anxious that Timothy remain faithful to this wonderful gospel that Paul had been privileged to preach and uphold. In conclusion, we might summarise his exhortations to Timothy along the lines of Paul's three responsibilities that we have just outlined.

1. **Paul the preacher says**, "Don't preach anything else other than this gospel as a way of salvation."
2. **Paul the Apostle says**, "Don't affirm and uphold anything else other than this gospel as the message of God."
3. **Paul the teacher of the Gentiles says**, "Don't teach anything else as truth to be obeyed other than this gospel."

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